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The Middle Aged Lover

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THE

MIDDLE-AGED LOVER.

A Story.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD,

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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THE

MIDDLE-AGED LOVER.

CHAPTER I.

"A LITTLE MUSIC."

EMBOLDENED by the success of his visit to Mr. Doughty, and stimulated by the appeals of his lady, the clergymanical Mr. Gardiner determined to make a yet more daring attempt, and resolved to invite the great patron. He asked Mr. Doughty to a little quiet dinner, with a few friends to come in the evening. As the Braham Nagles

Q 4

"lived with the rose," it was felt that their company would help to secure the precious flower itself, so coveted by all Brickford; and the clergyman and his family, presuming on the service they had rendered to Mr. Doughty in ejecting the old organist, determined to strike boldly for the prize on their own account.

As we have seen, there was a coolness between the brothers Gardiner since the day when Will Gardiner had began to divine that his relation was making secret advances to the golden calf. So here was a new element in the competition. The clerical Gardiners were not so well off as the secular Gardiners, and this extravagance of the dinner was not quite warranted; but the heads of the family had agreed that "some exertion should be made for the children," and that if they were to strike at all, they must strike quickly.

As everything that took place in Brickford circles became known to every one living there, this proceeding had excited much bitterness in the soul of Mrs. William Gardiner, a pushing and even unscrupulous lady, not overcharged with delicacy, and who was supposed to have a great deal of the gift known as "management." She was one of those persons, who, if a plain, disagreeable speech was to be said, said it without scruple or compunction for the feelings of the person she addressed. For the parson's lady she had always a sort of contempt, as for one she called "a poor creature;" and their bold bid for the favour of the golden calf seemed to her nothing but impertinence, and a very clumsy piece of impertinence too. However, as the two families were celebrated for their affection, and the brothers were considered the Damon and Pythias of Brickford, there

was no apparent change in their relations, and Mr. and Mrs. William Gardiner attended in state at the "little music" in the evening.

The dinner party was to have consisted of Mr. Doughty, who seemed not at all well, "the Braham Nagles," as they were styled collectively, the new Doctor Spooner, and another clergyman. But at the last moment came an apology from Mr. Doughty, who, however, said if he were strong enough he would come in the evening. It was a dreary, fussy entertainment: all "effort" on the part of the hosts, with none on the side of the guests. The clerical Gardiners, being modest in their aims, it will be seen, did not much care to interfere between the rich man and the Nagles, feeling powerless for any grand schemes of the kind, but were content to obtain such sort of jackal's share as could

be got from the goodwill or generosity of either party. They had, besides, heartily accepted the new Brickford theory that all danger of anything taking place between Mr. Doughty and Corinna was now over.

Mr. Nagle was in his greatest vein, and recurred, now plaintively, now triumphantly, to the great master who had formed his voice. He told new stories of Grimani, and explained that "it was hopeless now to look for style in the world," and that the "art of oiling the voice" was now confined to those few who had the tradition. "A few of us," he said, "can do it, but it will soon be utterly lost."

Doctor Spooner asked innocently: "And can you really oil the human voice?"

"Just as one would a cart wheel," Mr. Nagle replied. "It works along the larynx, squeaking and grinding; you call in a professional person, who lubricates, and softens,

and bends, and mollifies; and after a course, a suitable course, I mean," added Mr. Nagle, with emphasis—"six, twelve, or eighteen lessons, as required, or according to agreement—the organ glides along the prepared channel without friction, creaking, or—hum—any inconvenience."

"How singular!" said the new doctor, deferentially, "really this is very curious."

After the diners had gone up to the drawing-room, the evening guests began to arrive. There were many whispers as people saw Corinna sitting up as stately "as though she were enthroned;" and many private wonderings "where on earth young Duke was." And among these wonderers, the most conspicuous was Mrs. William Gardiner. With a smiling sympathy that lady found her way to Corinna, and squeezing her hand again and again, began

smiling and nodding with mysterious condolence.

"All going well?" she would say, with a fresh squeeze of congratulation. "I know it is. Dear, dear! My dear, how pale and ill you look. But you must promise me, dear, that you won't be fretting yourself." Then, very mysteriously, "Isn't he here to-night?"

She was celebrated for this pleasant and welcome style of talk.

Corinna did not affect ignorance or wonder, nor was she put out. But she was too proud to accept such thrusts without return, and could not resist saying:

"Do you mean my father's friend, Mr. Doughty? He is to be here."

The lady tittered with a great deal of meaning. It was hard to put her down.

"Oh, I wouldn't allude to that. Indeed, I didn't intend it. But will it not be a

most painful thing for you both to meet after those verses. It was very stupid of these people, for they must have known."

"I don't believe that Mr. Doughty had anything to do with the matter," said Corinna coldly. "I have long since dismissed it from my thoughts."

And here was that gentleman himself coming in with the other gentleman, looking very pale and ill, as, indeed, was universally remarked.

The musical family were presently called upon for their performance, and Mr. Nagle took his place at the instrument in very different style from that of the first evening on which he had the honour of being presented to the reader. He had now a lofty air: there was no servile and confidential panegyric of the pianoforte. He sat down with an air of rough criticism, as though he were seating himself in the saddle on

the back of a horse on whose merits he was to pronounce. "A bichord of the old pattern, Gardiner," he said, looking over his shoulder. "Might be more lively in the ivory parts. Wants rebuffing. Never mind. We must only clap the spurs into him." And so he did, and away he cantered his fingers over the "ivories," his eyes closing as if in exquisite relish of the harmonies. The Broadwood of the yellow tusks was now in the garret, and spoken of as "that wretched old jingler." Mr. Nagle's instrument was now virtually Mr. Doughty's magnificent "iron grand," at which he pounded away daily.

CHAPTER II.

STARTLING NEWS.

CORINNA was presently called to "the bichord" to give one of her songs. She chose Meyerbeer's touching "Ah! Mon Fils!"—whose long-drawn and pathetic wailing went to the hearts of all present. The light of her large eyes seemed to glisten through tears; while her rich voice trembled with a pathetic tenderness. Of course Mr. Nagle, with such an opportunity, became, as it were, rapt to his favourite "seven-and-twentieth heaven"—his face upturned, and his head

thrown back, while he seemed to be scrutinising the angle of the cornice; his mouth forming all the notes, while his fingers strayed about the keys as if it were he, Nagle, after all, that was extracting this feeling, this expression, this tenderness, from his child's soul! He was "playing" upon her.

She had never produced such an effect upon the Brickfordians. They were hushed in stillness, and for the time forgot all the subjects of gossip which they associated with this young heroine. They were awed as under the influence of something ethereal and spiritual. When the lament was finished, there was a hushed stillness more eloquent than applause.

The pale face of Mr. Doughty was lighted up with enthusiasm. He was beside her in a moment. Every eye followed their movements.

"Enchanting!" he said. "What a pity that one should be absent who would have been more delighted than any one here."

Corinna turned to him, and with a voice that trembled slightly, said:

"I am glad you have made that allusion," she said; "it shows that you are still pursuing the noble and generous purpose which you lately have had before your mind. If it be a satisfaction to you to know, I can tell you that you have succeeded. You have made me the object of these people's attention, the food for their vulgar gossip, and you have mortified and wounded me to the quick. I do feel it, and have felt it all, as much as you could possibly desire. And yet I can tell you, you little know what you have done; my punishment is not so complete as you may think. It may one day recoil upon yourself."

His lips trembled as he answered her:

"I told you before that you misjudged me, and you do so still. I will not pretend to misunderstand you, as perhaps another would do. But I can tell you I have had no scheme of vengeance. And for what," he added, putting on his old sarcastic manner, "for what was I to avenge myself? What injury have you done me?" Then glancing in her face, he suddenly changed his tone. "Forgive me! With you I should be ashamed to resort to subterfuges. You know well what my feelings were towards you, and what I wished to do if I saw that it would have been acceptable; but I was wise enough to save myself. I did not wish to be ridiculous, I did not, indeed, for I am sensitive, more so than you would suppose."

"And I?" said Corinna, gently; "can you not suppose that I also have my share

of sensitiveness and pride? I, the poor music-master's daughter, who live in a perfect glare of suspicion, envy, jealousy, and dislike . . . But that has passed away now. It is enough that I have seen all along, what perhaps no one else did, the unkind purpose you have had in you mind ever since—I must say it—of humiliating me—"

"As I live, no," he answered fervently. "I wished to save you, to open your eyes, to prove to you the worthlessness of the object on which you had—well, to which you had sacrificed one that knew your worth and perfection. If this be vengeance, I confess it all. If this be humiliation—I own to it. I warned you that you had placed your faith and hopes on one who would desert you. But why should I not tell you formally what I feel to you—what I——"

It was the most unlucky thing in the

world that Will Gardiner should have entered the room in his excited way while this interesting dialogue was going on. It might have led on to something that would perhaps have rendered further narrative unnecessary. Here he was whispering about the room eagerly, saying in scarcely suppressed tones that "it was shameful," "scandalous," and that somebody "ought to be kicked." Within five minutes every one in the room knew that young Duke was gone—had fled from Brickford! He had been ordered away; had exchanged from his crack regiment into one that was to embark for foreign service, and was gone!

Will Gardiner, troubled at heart with the news, for he felt that it made the situation dangerous again, could not resist taking "Old Doughty" aside to tell him.

"A regular case of cutaway and deser-

tion, for which he ought to be had up before the magistrate; but the poor girl! who is to tell her, or how? I think you would be the man; better than one of these fussing, meddling women, who would truss and spit her any day, and enjoy it."

But already he saw, with some confusion, that his lady had taken the pleasing office on herself, and was "sympathising" with Corinna. Faces, curious and malicious both, converged to hers as to a focus, to see "how she took it." Even the most delicate could not resist. The situation was delicious. There she was, "left in the lurch;" where two stools were concerned, as the doggerel bard had sung, the result was nearly always invariable.

But her ally, Mr. Doughty, was again beside her. They thought she was acting wonderfully when they saw her smiling on him. She was, they supposed, already

trimming her sails, and trying to repair the loss. But she was saying, in low, trembling tones,

"You can congratulate yourself on the success of your scheme. To-night must be a genuine triumph for you."

He could not resist answering, sadly, "A miserable triumph for my judgment. Alas! I foresaw all this from the beginning."

"And you, who professed to care for me, could expose me to this!"

Her father was coming over to make her sing again. Good, easy man, he had not heard the great news; he was expounding to a small admiring audience how the great Braham had sung in Westminster Abbey, at the Festival, etc. He had now graciously condescended to allow his daughter to give them the "Cherry," the imperishable "Cherry Ripe." Corinna's was a gallant

soul. Poor child! She never flinched for a second, and with all eyes bent on her, gave the jocund song, with all trills and tripping graces, in the true coquettish style, as though her heart were as light and careless as a bird's. Her eyes wandered to where Mr. Doughty was sitting, and settled on him a moment steadily. Perhaps she was singing at him to prove that his cruel purpose had not affected her, or to the greedy Brickfordians. He listened to the close, rose up, and stole away quietly without wishing good-night to anybody.

Then came a general buzz and breaking up. The centre of attraction was absent; so there was now no particular inducement for remaining. Mr. Nagle looked not a little bewildered when he found that his noble friend was gone. As for the sudden departure of young Duke, it scarcely affected him. He did not see it in the

light that the public did. "The young fellow is off for an outing," he said. "He is of a volatile description. A little too staccato in his motions, but a fine spirit. We shall make a singer of him one of these days."

"Yes; but see here, my friend Nagle, you should look at this more seriously," said Will Gardiner, who was really concerned. "How about Miss Corinna? He has been carrying on there very seriously. I hope to heaven she has been sensible enough not to think of it as more than a little flirtation. As it is, the fellow has behaved shabbily. I always said he was a thorough cad."

"Oh, leave it to me," said Mr. Nagle, who began to think it was an advantage to have the young man out of the way. "I know the right chord to touch. Young people will philander a little, and no harm

done. When I lead in the orchestra, I lead with my full score before me, sir."

With which rather enigmatical declaration, Mr. Nagle began wishing good-night all round, and took his daughter home.

When they reached the Crescent, Corinna was given a letter privately by the maid, who had a look of sympathy on her face. In her room Corinna opened and read it :—

"I am very sorry I could not see you before I went away; but the whole has been arranged very suddenly. I am going out to India, and may not be back for years.

"I have been driven from this place by the vulgar persecution of the people here, who would not allow me to associate with people whom I liked, without low remarks and impertinent libels. Only this morning

I received some coarse verses in which your name and mine, and that of a third party, were made free with in the grossest way. They have succeeded in their ends. I am delighted to have done with them, as you know not what I have endured all the time I have been here.

"You will say, why should I not say good-bye to you in the regular way, and see you again. I will tell you. Your father's manner to me has always been—forgive me for saying so—particularly unpleasant. You yourself are perfection, a perfect lady, as my mother says, but *he* has somehow always jarred upon me. I never admired any one so much as you, nor ever shall again, and if I had not seen that you were, as my mother says, playing me off against another man—but there is no use talking of all that now. It is plain to every one here that your family had designs on

that man, and his dislike and jealousy of me was quite evident. I have now retired, and left the field open to him, wishing you all happiness, whatever be the lot in life that you may choose.

"Believe me always your friend,

"ALFRED DUKE."

Corinna read it quite calmly to the end.

"He was unworthy of me, and, after the few first days, I always suspected his devotion. Thank heaven, I never gave him my affections, as I was tempted to do that first night!"

We now turn to another house when the night closed in, and see Mr. Doughty pacing his room in agitation. "This is my triumph," he would stop and say to himself, "but what an unworthy one. Oh! what blind stupidity! She will only hate me for this mortification. No! I am not fit to be

of this world; a child knows more, and has more wit. The ground is cleared, and what I thought an obstacle is gone, and yet I am no nearer. She will despise me for what she will consider nothing but the meanest, poorest exhibition of spite, the true part of the dog in his manger. What I have no chance of enjoying myself, I must at least hinder others from enjoying."

He grew more and more agitated as he walked. "And is this to be always my lot in the world? Every blessing—first youth, then money—turned into a curse. I was young, and a man older, and more crafty in the world's ways, snatched what I loved from me. I am older, and have the same advantage, and youth comes between me and her. I was poor, and was despised; I am now rich, and my money stands in the way. I would be generous, and sacrifice myself, and yet events take

this cursed shape, and make me appear as if I had brought all this about. Let her have him if she loves him. Above all, let her not have a contempt for me; I must be saved from that."

Mr. Doughty's servant heard his master pacing about in this fashion for some hours, and was at last abruptly summoned to his room to receive orders to have the things packed for the first train in the morning.

"But you are not well enough to travel. Doctor Spooner, sir, said particularly——"

"I am not going to travel," was the reply. "Be sure you call me in time."

Mr. Doughty was called in time, or rather was up and dressed before he was called, looking very haggard and worn, and, indeed, scarcely able to stand. Before seven o'clock he was at the railway, and had gone no one in Brickford knew whither. Had they known of his departure, there would

have been infinite wonder in Brickford, and perhaps infinite inquisition, at even the railway station, to ascertain an answer to the speculation, "What on earth could have taken him away ?"

CHAPTER III.

A GLIMPSE OF HOPE.

THUS had young Duke escaped from Brickford and from his entanglements there. Of course he might have managed a more respectable, and certainly a more honourable, mode of retirement; a few words with Corinna, and he could have departed with notice, and in a decorous fashion. But the truth was this young man had a sense of guilt, and he knew that he dared not, under the calm, deep-searching gaze of his lady-love, present his lame story, or request to be al-

lowed to withdraw, though he might expect that such a request would be at once granted. No serious proposal had, indeed, been offered, no formal declaration of the gentleman's love had been made. Still he had "gone far enough," as it is called—quite far enough to make him feel guilty. He was something of a gentleman, too, and he felt that if it once came to explanations so delicate, all would be over, and he must declare himself plainly. He did not relish the idea of the blood of all the Dukes commingling with that of "a common music-master;" he turned from the notion of Braham Nagle as a father-in-law with horror and disgust, and had Corinna been a real angel instead of merely enjoying the complimentary title, he would have shrunk from so terrible a contamination. Then there was Lady Duke—his regiment expecting him—in short he had to fly. It

was better to arrange the whole in the way he had done.

At all events, here he was now, at an hotel in Southampton, feeling some compunctious twinges, but, it must be confessed, also feeling a great weight off his mind. It would never have done, he said to himself; it would have been misery for the girl herself, this taking her out of her station; and they would have both heartily repented of it before long. They had neither of them a shilling. Why, was it not sheer folly and madness, whatever way you looked at it?

One of the great Indian troop-ships was lying in the docks, preparing to take out the regiment into which he had exchanged. There was the usual bustle and business; the slinging on board of horses and baggage; the shouting and labouring of fatigue parties; the confusion of wives and

followers of all kinds. Mr. Duke was in his hotel, taking breakfast, and, to do him justice, thinking with a good many misgivings of the step he had taken, and for which he was perhaps not wholly responsible, as the whole arrangement had been craftily planned by his excellent mother. He found most comfort, however, in the repeated reflection that what he had done "was best for the poor girl herself," and finally came to think that he had really acted the part of a true friend.

He had offered himself this consolation for perhaps the twentieth time, when a card was brought in. As his eyes fell on it he could not repress an exclamation of impatience. Was it all going to begin over again? In a moment the pale face and spare figure of Mr. Doughty was before him.

"Now what do you want with me?"

said the young man, angrily. "Why have you come after me in this way? But what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I have not slept all night," said the other. "And I have not been well of late. Your departure has been very abrupt, and seems strange to your friends."

"Well *you* ought to be delighted," said the other. "I suppose you have the ground now quite open?"

"I do not think so. You have been far more fortunate than I have. You warned me some time ago that you would win in this little struggle, and I must own you have shown that you were right. I see I have no chance with you. Still, you must have indulgence for my delusion."

A look of pride came into the other's eyes. This artful tone laid him open to his more skilful rival.

"Well, of course, I know what girls

think in these matters," said the young man, softening, "and you must admit that you almost made it a question of honour, and threatened me. I couldn't draw back after that. She is the most charming, fascinating girl I ever met, and, I assure you, it cost me a hard struggle to give her up. But it was for the best. Our family has not money enough. I must look out for money, if I do marry——"

The other was looking at him eagerly.

"No, no; you don't mean that. That is not the reason. You thought her and her family beneath you. And your mother, too——"

"Oh, not at all," said the other, haughtily. "I am old enough to choose for myself now. But I could not afford to take such a step, as neither she nor I have money. I dare not marry under twenty or thirty thousand pounds."

"And you would persuade me that this is your objection. I am not a soldier, but I know something of the world——"

"Mr. Doughty," said the young man, starting up and colouring, "this is a very strange style. Can you mean that I am not telling the truth?"

"On the contrary; I am sure you are. Then let me tell you how rejoiced I am to hear you speak in this way. You are mistaken as to Corinna. She *has* a fortune, and a large one."

"Oh! ridiculous!" said Mr. Duke, astonished.

"Yes; a fortune of the very amount you named."

Mr. Duke gazed at him with a bewildered air.

"See, you are bound by your own declaration. You will admit nothing stands in the way now?"

"And the fortune comes from——"

"No matter whence. I guarantee it."

Young Mr. Duke remained silent for some time, thoroughly mystified; then his somewhat slow intelligence was quickened, and, with scornful flashing eyes, he exclaimed:

"Oh, I see! this is a fine scheme, and cleverly contrived, as you think, Mr. Doughty; but it won't answer."

"Won't answer!" repeated the other, with infinite scorn. "How little you know of me. Scheme, indeed! I wished to give you one more chance of behaving like a gentleman and a man of honour."

"You will not draw me into a quarrel by your language, nor is there any chance that your chivalrous proposal will be repeated back to the young lady by me."

"Indeed I am not likely to suppose so,"

said the other, sarcastically. "I can be acquitted of that at least."

"I suppose they sent you on this errand; I mean the clever gentleman who would like to have me for his son-in-law," said the young man, growing more and more angry. "But you must tell the whole truth when you go back. I have nothing to say about her, and stand to what I have said."

"Don't be afraid," said Mr. Doughty, with spirit; "there is no need of my speaking in the matter. You have taught her to appreciate you perfectly by this time. You said that, but for the want of money, you would fulfil your implied engagement. That obstacle is removed, and you still decline."

"And I decline your money; it would be unworthy of me to accept it—from you. I am a gentleman, and I say it isn't fair

of you to come to me in this way, and try to buy me, as if I was some common fellow. I dare say," added the young man, suddenly softening, as it began to dawn on him that Mr. Doughty, after all, might have been unselfish from the beginning, and was willing to sacrifice himself to see Corinna happy; "no doubt you mean well, and have acted more chivalrously than I could do, but still you don't make allowances. You see I am in such a hole, badgered right and left, up and down; my mother, you, her family, the wretched people at Brickford—all at me. You must make allowance for a young fellow in my position. And the best of it is," said the young man, after a struggle, "or the worst of it is, that I believe in my soul that she does not care for me after all."

A curious eagerness came into Mr. Doughty's eyes.

"Are you serious? Not care for you?" he repeated.

"No. She is such a mysterious girl, and so full of delicacy about her position and all that, I really believe she is afraid of letting it be seen for whom she cares. My mother, who is a woman of the world, has said so all along."

A delightful suspicion of the truth began to fill his hearer's soul. But he was determined to be chivalrous to the end, to keep to that reserve in the matter which he had maintained from the beginning. Every step in advance which he gained should be independent of that dreadful money with which he was so cruelly weighted.

"Yes," continued Mr. Duke, more and more under the influence of a generous impulse, or perhaps thinking that he was thus making his own share in the whole

transaction appear less objectionable, "she almost said as much to me the other day. See here, Doughty, I may as well be frank with you, and tell you more, as I have told you so much. But you seem ill and out of sorts. What *is* the matter? Will you take something?"

"I am not well," said the other; "and when I go back I fear I shall have to lay up. But you must forgive me for saying I do not invite this confidence nor ask you for it. It is generous of you; but still——"

"Oh, I don't mind. It's right you should know. The fact is, I own I took a dislike to you from the first, and did not like to be beaten out of the field by an older man. And then when you came in for that money, my pride was up, and I was determined all the more to beat you. Well, all the time I felt I was not up to her mark, and indeed she told me as much.

She is so honourable and high minded that, I suppose, she would have gone through with it, because she had led me to believe that she liked me. And I saw that long ago, and could not stand all the fuss and confusion of leave-taking, explanations, and the like, believing, too, that she liked some one else. So you see there is not so much harm done after all."

"Liked some one else!" cried Mr. Doughty, passionately, but again he checked himself. "But she never said this to you?"

"No: but my mother has said it all along. I believe, and my mother believes, that you are the man after all, and that she is afraid lest she should be thought to be looking after your money. There you have the whole murder out, and I think you will say I have behaved with gene-osity."

Mr. Doughty left his friend and late rival, after these revelations, almost bewildered. What had been thus told he himself had long ago accepted, in a fond complacency, but had been compelled rudely to dismiss. Now it all came back on him, and seemed to be no delusion, being confirmed by the testimony of a person not likely to compliment; from whom, indeed, it had been almost extorted. And yet this sensitive, shrinking, over-delicate being was presently doubting afresh, tortured anew by the idea that no such good fortune could be intended for him; and that the young man, in his wish to save himself from the appearance of having behaved shabbily, would be eager to give an exaggerated colouring to what he had revealed. He still felt ill, with a sort of shivering all over, and was indeed in such a state that Doctor Spooner would

have pronounced him fit only to be in his bed.

"Yes," he said aloud, as he paced up and down the room at the hotel, "there can be no room for mistake after this. But there is the old difficulty still."

He was restless and anxious. A letter from his solicitor had followed him to Southampton, begging of him to come to town forthwith, and wind up the affairs of his inheritance, a matter on which many more pressing letters had already been sent. There were the family valuables, the plate and pictures, a library, and papers, the "residuary account" for the Inland Revenue Office, with other important matters. If he could spare a day or so to business, matters would be smoothed and immensely simplified. This would distract his mind a little, and give him time to think.

Now we shall enter on a somewhat more stirring phase of this narrative, which indeed professes, at the best, to be no more than the chronicle of the love of a middle-aged gentleman with money, for the lovely Corinna, daughter to a poor, struggling music-master. The ups and downs, the advances and retreats in such an episode, may be thought unworthy the dignity of romantic narrative, and the question at issue might be considered uninteresting, or at least could be disposed of off-hand. Yet there is an interest and a sympathy connected with even so unpretending a little struggle; and the vicissitudes of a mind, however humble in worldly station, may be as dramatic in their way, as some of the most exciting incidents of an ambitious story.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GARDINERS "DO SOMETHING."

MR. DOUGHTY reached London and spent a good deal of the day there. His excited eyes and hot hands were noted by the man of business, who conjured him to get home as quickly as he could.

"I feel dreadfully ill, indeed," said the other; "and should there be any sickness coming on me, I may rely on your faithfully carrying out all that I have directed."

Mr. Doughty then left, and reached Brickford late that night. On the following morning Doctor Spooner was seen

hurrying to the house, and by-and-by Mr. Nagle had mounted the imaginary charger he kept for such dramatic occasions, and was cantering backwards and forwards between his own house and that of Mr. Doughty, drawing rein for a moment to tell a friend: "Poor Doughty struck down —seriously ill. Spooner says nervous fever. Sir Harvey Tupper telegraphed for from town—expect him about two o'clock." Then clapping spurs to his steed, he galloped on to make up for lost time. Somehow he could not help feeling exhilarated —not at the misfortune of his friend, but at the exciting times which were about to set in. A long and possibly dangerous illness; a lonely being, to be thrown entirely on *him*, Braham Nagle, as the only man in whom confidence was to be placed—he, Nagle, director, commander-in-chief — no more welcome picture could be imagined.

"We are in," he would say with a sort of unction, "for a downright serious piece of business." Everything was cast upon his shoulders; he would have to see to everything. And as a visible, tangible sign of responsibility which he styled "awful," as well as a sign of his being in possession and clothed with office, a little bed, or, as he called it, "a stretcher," was sent up that very afternoon to the house—an article of furniture that figured conspicuously in the many dramatic narratives of the exciting crisis that he furnished to his friends.

Mrs. Nagle was despatched to relieve guard, when duty compelled his own absence for a short while. But it must be said that he threw his professional duties completely overboard, save in a few choice instances where, though he attended, he did not give much satisfactory instruction.

He would sit at the instrument, allowing his fingers to stray away into mournful harmonies, while he dwelt on the suddenness, the *terrible* suddenness of the illness. "A man in the prime of life, a fine nature, and such a friend! I am not equal to this sort of thing: it has given me a shock: quite upset me," &c. He was, however, "equal" to booking the interview as a formal lesson, to be duly charged for. At the end of the jeremiad he looked at his watch. "Bless me, I must hurry off. We'll just try through the 'Swan' once."

Mr. William Gardiner, who had been absent from Brickford, on the day after Mr. Doughty's return, met Doctor Spooner in the street in the afternoon. From him he learned the dangerous nature of the malady, and hurried home to Mrs. Gardiner with the news. The lady, already in possession of the story, was much excited.

"The poor fellow," said Will, with sympathy. "I hope he will pull through."

"Serve him right," said Mrs. Gardiner, "with his childish rushing about the country. When a man gets to his time of life, if he hasn't learned sense, he never will. And his idiotic behaviour about that girl! But those Nagles, it seems, have already taken possession," continued the indignant lady. "That man has established himself on the premises, and sent in his bed! The girl, I suppose, will follow suit, and do nurse, with the gruel and all that. They'll make out, I suppose, that he won't take anything, except from her hand."

"Well, if he won't, he won't, and it's the only thing to be done. But she won't lend herself to that sort of business. She's too high minded for that. No, Corinna's no schemer, after all."

"Isn't she?" said the lady, growing

more excited. "It will be only the last part of the game she has been playing all through. See how cleverly she's got rid of the young man who was in the way. You think everybody in the world is innocent. You'll never do anything for your daughter or your family. I wish you'd find some way of getting money for us."

Will Gardiner grew gloomy and disturbed. "That Nagle," he said, "does think that Old Doughty and all his money belongs to him, as his private property. He *has* some extraordinary influence over him—of that there's no mistake."

"And what business has he in the house, pray, at all? A mere adventurer that has dropped down here from the skies! What unparalleled impudence to thrust himself in between a sick person and his blood relations!"

"It *is* confounded impudence; but what

are we to do? Old Doughty's not a chicken; and if he chooses to hand himself over to all the strollers and fiddlers in the town, we can't help it."

"That's what *you* always say in these matters. Can't help it! I always told you that if you showed a firm front the fellow would not have dared to go so far. You are too soft and mealy-mouthed altogether; too good-natured to everybody. He ought to be just taken by the shoulders and put out of the house."

When Mrs. Gardiner spoke in this rather rough style, calling a spade a spade with the noisiest emphasis, it had the effect of annoying her husband, not so much with her as with himself, and when his eyes were thus roughly opened, he was generally ready to plunge into any course, however opposed to the one which he had been previously pursuing.

"But what can the man do?" he said, after a pause. "If poor Doughty shouldn't get up again, they can't marry him on his death-bed to Corinna. She wouldn't do it if they wanted her. No, you won't persuade me of that."

"I'll tell you what they'll do, if they haven't got it done already; get him to make a will. Don't you see that he is wholly and solely in their hands now? I tell you we ought to do something."

"To be sure," said Will; "we mustn't leave the field all to Master Braham & Co."

"Who do you mean?" said his wife, contemptuously. "Master Braham & Co.! We are the nearest relations—we have a right to look after him and take care of him, and see that he is not pillaged, or at all events wrongly treated, by mere strangers. He should have a proper nurse. There's Ledger, that nursed me in my last confine-

ment, a most respectable, decent woman. She must take care of him; and until these people are got rid of, will see that everything is done correctly."

Will Gardiner looked at his wife with respect, and even with admiration. Here was something practical, which he felt would never have occurred to him. He took his hat and went about the business at once.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY SKIRMISHING ROUND THE PATIENT.

WHEN he entered the drawing-room of Mr. Doughty's house, he found Lady Duke waiting there, while a motherly-looking woman was in the hall. The lady went to meet him with a torrent of "Isn't this terrible?" &c. The London doctor, it seems, was upstairs in consultation with Spooner, and "that Nagle."

"The poor, poor fellow," continued she in the same voluble style. "What a dreadful way for him to be in. He is

really alone in the world—cut off from his relations."

"Well, ma'am, I don't think he seems to be quite deserted," said Will Gardiner, with a twinkle in his eye. He was incorrigible, and his wife might fairly despair of ever teaching him dignity.

"But he is. These people have taken possession of him. Surely you and I, who are his blood relations, are entitled to see him, at least, or to look after him. Really, for their own sakes, they ought to do so, if it be only to avoid curious stories and suspicions. Would you believe it, this Nagle, in his rough way, actually refused to let me upstairs?"

"Oh! One can't have this sort of thing," said Mr. Gardiner, excitedly. "We must come to an understanding at once. There must be no barring out the man's relations. Master Nagle—I mean Braham Nagle—

will find himself in the wrong box if he tries on any of those tricks."

"I am delighted to hear you say that," said Lady Duke, pressing his wrist warmly. "You know poor Doughty is really very bad, and, I hear his mind," she added, dropping her voice, "is a little astray, and all that. You see, with this party about him, they can concoct anything they please —and that doctor—I have my suspicions of him—will back them up. It was Nagle that sent for him, you know."

"Oh, I see!" said Will Gardiner, now quite unreserved. "I suspected my lad—I mean that Spooner—long ago. It's been planned very cleverly: just as if they saw what was coming."

"I'll tell you what," said Lady Duke, mysteriously; "for the sake of this poor sick creature, something MUST BE DONE AT ONCE! and a trustworthy person, who can

be depended on, placed about him. I have brought a faithful person who nursed all our family, and whom I always send for when my husband is ill. She is waiting in the hall."

Will Gardiner's mouth suddenly took a sour expression.

"I saw her," he said, "in the hall. You have lost no time, ma'am; but I ought to mention that Mrs. Gardiner has chosen some one who belongs to the place, who is more at home here. She attended her in her illness."

"Now that was so thoughtful of her! So like her, always thinks of everything! After all, it is not much matter, provided it be a safe person. And—she was ill? Dear me! not a fever, I hope?"

"No, her confinement," said Mr. Gardiner, readily.

"Ah, never do!" she answered, with a

sorrowful smile; "that, you know, requires quite a different sort of training. Ah! here they come! now we shall know!"

Mr. Nagle was ushering in the great London doctor, and led him to a desk where he was to write prescriptions, Doctor Spooner following deferentially. Lady Duke flew over to Mr. Nagle, and caught at his wrist, her favourite confidential mode.

"Now, how is he? Any danger? What does the doctor say?"

Mr. Nagle's head was in a sort of azure empyrean, while the rest of his person moved in the fogs of earth. He answered somewhat brusquely:

"My good madam, we can't attend to you now. I must really beg of you to—Oh, Gardiner! you're there?"

"Well, what's the news?" said that gentleman, in his natural voice—a loud one.

"Oh, hush! hush! come now!" said the other, reproachfully, and pointing to the ceiling. "We can't have the room full of people in this way. It disturbs and excites him."

"See now here, what do you mean, Nagle?" answered Will Gardiner, angrily. "Do you want to turn us out, the man's blood relations? I can tell you there'll be a pretty disturbance if you attempt it."

Mr. Nagle turned red. "Well, I can't talk to you now. It's really indecent, a discussion of such a kind."

Lady Duke had seized the opportunity of this little dispute to approach the doctor.

"I am Lady Duke, Sir Harvey," she said. "Let me introduce myself. A near relative of your poor patient upstairs. I want you to tell me," she added, drawing him over into her window, "*all* about it.

Is it so serious? Should he not have his relatives and women about him, to watch him and tend him properly?"

The doctor bowed; he was a fashionable physician, and liked people of title.

"Most certainly," he said. "It is most desirable, and has a soothing effect. This gentleman here, who takes such an interest in the case, is hardly suited—by himself, I mean. I have told him he must get a regular nurse."

"I have brought one," said Lady Duke, eagerly; "she is below at this moment. The most faithful creature in the world—has attended us all—Sir James and my son —myself."

"Well, if she be qualified, I dare say she will be very suitable. I was thinking of a young lady whom Mr. Doughty mentioned—his mind is not very clear or steady now, but the name was Corinna, I

think—and Mr. Nagle tells me there was an attachment, or something of the kind. If so, her presence now would have a soothing effect."

"My dear Sir Harvey," said the lady, drawing him further into the window, "you are not supposed to know the stories of this place; but it is my duty to tell you that this girl has a good deal to do with his illness. A most unfortunate business from the beginning—treated him very badly—and I should fear that her presence——"

"Oh, indeed!" said Sir Harvey; "that is very different."

Mr. Nagle and the local doctor had now come up.

"I think," said the London doctor, "on the whole, that young lady you mentioned had better not come. It would agitate the patient, eh? Better leave it alone altogether."

"My dear Sir Harvey, why it's my

daughter—my own daughter. The fact is——"

"The fact is, my good sir, I am here to speak the plain truth; and that is, that the gentleman upstairs is in a very critical state. And I tell whoever are his relations and have the duty of taking care of him, that he must not be agitated. I merely state what ought to be done; and it is their concern whether it be carried out or not."

"Hear, hear! I mean quite so," said Will Gardiner, correcting himself with some confusion. "Lady Duke and I are his nearest blood relations. Mr. Nagle here is a comparative stranger, and no relation in the world. We can't stand on delicacy here, or be disputing about such matters; and I am sure Mr. Nagle will see he ought to submit to the directions of the physicians."

Mr. Nagle turned pale. He was not

prepared for this spirited attack. He had, indeed, all through his life, made but a poor show before resistance, and in his own profession had often given way before pretenders more audacious than himself. But at this crisis he found an ally in Doctor Spooner, who said quietly:

"This seems rather unfair towards Mr. Nagle, who has all through been the intimate and chosen friend of the patient. There are no designs such as have been insinuated here, nor any wish to interfere with the relations. But I can take on myself to say, that any such uncourteous dismissal of Mr. Nagle would be most improper, on the very ground that Sir Harvey has stated. It would certainly agitate the patient. As the physician in charge of the case, I entirely disapprove of it."

These words were delivered calmly, quietly, and with a grave authority, and

had due effect. Professional esprit du corps came to aid, and Sir Harvey Tupper at once rallied to his brother with a "Quite so," a form of agreement common to the legal and medical professions. "There must be no agitation," went on the physician. "Things are going on very well as they are. Any discussions of this kind had best be adjourned until the convalescence—which we may hope for."

Mr. Nagle darted a half-defiant, half scared look at his enemies; while Will Gardiner coloured and fumed. Lady Duke, however, was not to be routed so easily.

"Just what I say," she exclaimed. "The one grand thing is to have our poor Doughty properly looked after and brought through. Where the life of a person we are interested in is at stake, there can be no standing on delicacy and that sort of

thing. I have the nurse here, in the very house."

"Oh, I shall take care of all that," said Doctor Spooner, gently. "I have a proper person selected, whom I can answer for professionally. It is very good of Lady Duke to take so much trouble, and it does her honour; but I must take on myself the responsibility, as we cannot run any risks in such a case. She is already engaged, and will be here this evening."

"Quite proper," said the London doctor, "and only the regular course."

Lady Duke, as well as Mr. Gardiner, looked a little confounded at this method of settling the matter, but remained silent. There was, indeed, nothing more to be said. The physician took his leave and went to the inn to lunch, promising to see the patient again before he returned to town. As he retired some more of "the

relations" met him on the stairs. The Reverend Mr. Gardiner and his lady had discussed the matter in a dialogue, which in spirit was much the same as what had taken place between the *other* Mr. Gardiner and his wife, and had decided on this visit.

Mrs. Gardiner carried something in her hand, and the two had sympathising faces. Lady Duke and Will Gardiner looked at them significantly; but the new arrivals were wholly unfitted for taking part in such a struggle, having neither the boldness nor the shiftiness necessary to hold their ground, or push their advance.

"What, you here?" said Will, scoffingly. "Oh! I declare this is too good!"

"Oh, yes," said his brother; "it is dreadful, isn't it, and so sudden too. He dined with us only so lately. He must have had it on him then."

"Well, it is believed that he got it at your house," said Will. "It was a raw night, you recollect. I dare say if you had left him quietly at home, he'd have been all right now. What have you got there, Jemima?"

"We made up a little calf's-foot jelly," she said, hesitating; "it is the best thing he could take. I know it saved one of the children. If we could get him to take it——"

Will Gardiner gave a meaning smile. "Dear me, how *very* thoughtful. I say, Spooner, do you think you can admit this lady with her pot of calf's-foot jelly? she wishes to administer it herself."

"Oh no; all those sort of things are idle at the present stage. You may depend on it, ma'am, I shall take care that he has everything necessary. It is thoughtful of you, no doubt."

"But surely," said the reverend gentleman, with some hesitation, "as his clergyman, he being one of my own flock, really I have some right to look after his spiritual state. If his situation is so critical, it is a duty, you know——"

"Utterly impossible," said the doctor. "I veto it entirely. I shall let no one see him for the present, except, of course, Mr. Nagle, who has been here from the beginning. I take it all on myself, as his medical adviser."

"There," said Will Gardiner, a little maliciously, "you can take back your calf's-foot jelly, and give it to one of the children."

"You need not direct us as to that," said his brother, tartly; "but I begin to understand what is going on here. I assure you no trickery will do. Doughty is as much our relation as yours."

"Nobody denies that. What on earth do you mean by talking to me in that style? Who wants any trickery, as you call it? My dear friend, if you were to turn out as many pots of calf's-foot as Crosse and Blackwell, and send them here in vans, it wouldn't do."

Alas! for the brothers, with their arms encircling each other! Alas! for Orestes and Pylades, and the Sunday walks, which were to be from this time forth things of the past!

Thus the first skirmish round the prostrate Doughty found the affectionate Gardiners in fierce conflict, and all was changed.

CHAPTER VI.

CORINNA'S RESOLVE.

WILL GARDINER came away in company with Lady Duke. "It's really like 'the quarantine,'" she said, her rejected nurse following behind; "they want to draw a cordon sanitaire round the poor creature."

"It certainly *is* an odd thing," said he, "that a man's relatives should be turned out of a house in this sort of style. I tell you what, Lady Duke," he added, abruptly, "I don't half like that Spooner; he is too smooth. He and Master Nagle are

pulling an oar apiece in the same boat."

"I quite agree with you. Of course one don't wish to intrude or force oneself in; but I certainly think it is a duty to a poor friendless being, not to let him be handed over to strangers—who may be doing all that is proper—Heaven forbid that I should judge them; but I do think the whole thing has a very suspicious look."

"So do I, Lady Duke," said he, warmly. "I don't like this keeping guard, and shutting out people, and letting in others. Why should that fellow Nagle constitute himself keeper if the poor sick fellow isn't to be agitated? Why, if there was a man in the world that would agitate and fuss, he is the very fellow."

"And the real danger is," she answered, in her mysterious voice, "that we don't know what they may do. What is to pre-

vent them putting a pen into the poor creature's hand, and making him sign all sorts of things. Such things you know have been done before now, and by very respectable people."

"Just the thing that our singing-master would do. And see here, my dear lady, how they have got all their own party about him, from the doctor down to the nurse. I know what I'll do. They shan't dispose of me in that fashion. As soon as the poor fellow gets better, or worse, and he must do one or the other, I'll just walk in, and not stir from the house until I see him—not if there were fifty Nagles and Spooners to prevent me."

After their departure, Mr. Nagle returned home "to snatch a morsel," but not in the best of humours. He felt a little uncomfortable at the thought of the daring combined attempt that had been made to

drive him out, and was by no means secure as to the future. He felt also equally disturbed at the idea that he had been saved not by his own exertions, but had been indebted to the quiet power of his protégé the doctor. This obligation hurt his pride a little, and on the whole he met his family in a rather irritated state.

"There's a mob broken in up there; a perfect cabal, struggling to get a front row as if it was a Jenny Lind night. It's disgusting—disgraceful! But what can I do up there, with no one to help? Corinna, you'll have to come up with me to-morrow, and keep watch and watch about. I wouldn't put any villany past this gang. They're furious."

"How do you mean 'watch and watch?'" said Corinna coldly. "Is it that I am to attend Mr. Doughty?"

"Oh, of course," he answered, testily. "Be

his nurse, and that sort of thing. It'll make him as good as your husband; for when he gets better, and begins to try and recollect who gave him his medicine, who smoothed his pillow, and did the ministering angel, and all that, he'll be bound to come forward. The man loves you; surely you can see that with half an eye, and now that that skulking snapjacker has taken himself off, there's no let or impediment. Come, come," added Mr. Nagle, with sudden excitement, for he saw a stern opposition in Corinna's eyes, "I'll have no disputation about it. I owe money enough in this place, and we can't afford to be doing romance."

"But," said Corinna, now speaking with a deliberate coldness that alarmed him, "as you are calculating all the chances of the case, suppose that this poor patient should be sick to death and not recover."

"Pooh, nonsense," said her father. "Don't be saying such odd things. That would be a pretty story indeed. Though Heaven knows, with the tormenting gang that want to break in and mob him, it would be hard for any one to recover. It's indecent, so it is. Have you no feelings for a poor lonely creature, that hasn't a true friend in the world outside ourselves? Wouldn't you care to save him from the harpies round him, who would just think nothing of forcing a pen into his hand, and making him sign away every ha'porth he has in the world? Where would we all be then, I should like to know?"

It was unlucky that Mr. Nagle should have jumbled an appeal to natural feeling with less honourable motives of action. The result was that it would be hard to give an idea of the scorn that flashed from Corinna's eyes, as she replied:

"So now we have it all revealed at last! Oh, father, father, is this what you wish your daughter to do—to make me struggle with these people for a place at his bedside? Have I not abased myself enough by playing the double game I have done? I can do it no more. I must not do it."

"Not do it! Well, of all——" began Mr. Nagle.

"No. At whatever cost, I refuse. As I told you before, the time has come for me to do something to earn my bread, and fortunately an opportunity has offered. I see the sort of profession you would destine me to; use me for some mercenary scheme—force me on a man who would despise me in his soul for lending myself to these degrading plots—that is, if he ever recover strength and health. You have hunted me out on the world! And I may tell you

this, that if I had not been forced into this course of double dealing, now forcing me on this man, now on that, or whichever of the two appeared most likely to offer himself first—and if you had followed a straightforward honest course, you might at this moment have been free from all trouble and anxiety in this matter——"

"Ah! What d'ye mean with all this rigmarole? Not that you would have been married by this time! That fellow Duke showed he was eager enough, I'm sure."

"I repeat," said Corinna, "you might have attained all your hopes by this time. But it is no matter how at this moment. You forced me to play a degrading part, and little fancied that you were making me play one of another sort. Instead of leaving me to my own natural course, you chose this one of finessing and trick, and

you have only sacrificed my happiness, and disappointed yourself."

"Which of the two do you mean?" said he eagerly, tortured by this mysterious denunciation. "Why every man, woman, and child in the place saw that you cared for that Duke."

"It is no matter now, as all is over. I must leave this place at once, as I will not be forced to sink lower than I have done. Very fortunately I am enabled to do so, as only a few days ago an opening occurred. That opera manager is good enough to say that he has confidence in my gifts; that he is sure he will not lose. I do not believe he will, and I have accepted."

The amazement with which Mr. Nagle received this piece of news could not be conceived. He was one of those men who have no force of character, and know not how to confront a crisis of this kind, but

become perfectly helpless. A little bluster —"I'll not suffer it," "I'll not tolerate it," "It must be stopped," had only the effect of a wave dashing against a stone wall. He felt this helplessness, and, in presence of his daughter, could find neither words, argument, nor resolution.

"But what am *I* to do?" he said, at last; "this is all very fine. You think only of yourself. Who's to pay the bills in this place? Here have I spent my time and abilities trying to get you 'off,' and now I am left in the lurch. This man will never recover, and how will we all look then?"

"Then Heaven forgive me and us all for the unfeeling, cruel part we have played; the unworthy game of deception and double dealing to which he has been made the victim."

"You may say that," said her father.

"If you had played your cards properly we should all have been lodged in his house by this time, and this gang of schemers daren't show their faces there."

It was curious how Mr. Nagle should have applied the same terms to his rivals that they did to him.

"I am as much to blame as any one else," she answered softly, and with her devoted eyes turned up to heaven; "but he will recover, we must pray, and forget those who have caused him so much pain and misery. Let us talk no more of this now, father. One day it will all be cleared up, and he may know that I have not been so heartless as I have appeared."

With this she swept from the room, leaving her father as "put out" as he had ever been before in the whole course of his life.

There were some expressions uttered by

that gentleman which might have puzzled some of his friends to whom he had been accustomed to dilate on his prosperity, and on the way in which he was "hunted" by pupils, with "not a moment to snatch a bit of dinner," "won't let me keep my very soul in my body." But, as the reader may have already suspected, a good deal of this flourishing state of things was oratorical. The little memorandum-book was, indeed, filled with engagements, but some had begun to suspect that it had about the same relation to real life that a stage volume has to the brain of an actor, who affects to read what disturbs or soothes his soul. Mr. Nagle had been brought up in a certain school, in which it was taught that the great art of success lay in ever seeming busier than you were, thus imitating the barrister's tactics, the little memorandum-book, with its crowded pages, being to the

professor what a bag is to the other. Such were the tactics of the illustrious Grimani, whose cabriolet and fiery steed were always urged at headlong speed through the streets of Brighton, always "fearful of being late," and was about as well known as a flying doctor's. Mr. Nagle, however, had not succeeded in making the "system" pay, for the reason that he devoted too much time to the new and more important profession which he had adopted, namely, attendance on his friend, Mr. Doughty, calculating that that gentleman, either by his marriage with Corinna, or by some direct pecuniary assistance, would indemnify all losses. Just too as the household purveyors, butchers, bakers, &c., were beginning to press for a settlement now overdue, this unfortunate illness came in the way, and reduced him to a position of much embarrassment. There was, therefore, every

reason for his dependence on his daughter. But Corinna was inflexible. She was determined to leave Brickford, and she met his objections by declaring that all she earned—for she was to begin by singing at concerts in London—should be sent to him. She had fixed the following Monday for her departure, and her father, making rueful protest, and declaring that she was an ungrateful child, and would be his ruin, had to accept the arrangement.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOCTOR'S SISTER.

MEANWHILE, the unhappy being who was the object of these intrigues continued in the same critical state, and remained under the care of Doctor Spooner. That practitioner had presently installed the nurse, in whom he had such professional confidence. That this confidence was warranted, was proved by the fact that she was no other than his sister, a lady who kept house for him, but who was, indeed, no more than a sort of upper servant in his house, whom no one

thought of "calling upon," when the Spooners first arrived, and who did not desire to be called upon. There are many persons in the world who thus, in spite of an official position which entitles them to respect and consideration, somehow sink into a lower rank. She was a reserved, dark-eyed person, considerably older than her brother, of whom she seemed to stand in great awe. Visitors rarely saw her save when she flitted past them, gliding up-stairs or down-stairs, and Will Gardiner declared that she gave exactly the idea of one who, "when a girl, had been captured and brought back as she was going off with the groom, or who had been caught taking ribbons off a shop counter, and had been in disgrace ever since. Heaven forgive me for saying such a thing," he would add; "but, 'pon my soul, the idea *will* come back. She can't look you straight in the

face." This lady's name was Harriet. She was altogether a very singular person.

Mr. Nagle was not a little surprised to find this lady in occupation when he returned to Mr. Doughty's house. It seemed to him rather an abrupt and off-hand proceeding of Doctor Spooner thus "to foist" his own sister on the patient, without consultation with him—too much of a job to instal *two* members of a family. But he forgot that this was what he wished to do himself. As he strode up-stairs the new nurse came out, her finger on her lips, and uttered a very authoritative "hush."

"Better for you not to come in now," she said, "he is asleep."

"Oh, nonsense, ma'am," Mr. Nagle was beginning. "I wish to see myself how he is getting along."

"No, no; my brother's orders are strict.

Come down with me to the drawing-room if you wish to say anything."

Mr. Nagle had a good deal to say, and when he got into the room, and the door was closed, broke out, angrily:

"What is the meaning of this, woman? Where's Spooner?"

"He will be back in a moment, and then you can speak to him. I cannot stay away longer, so you must excuse me."

Doctor Spooner was not long in returning. Mr. Nagle at once grappled with him.

"See here, sir," he said, "I should like to know who directs in this house—you, I, or the woman that has been foisted in on that poor sick fellow?"

"My dear Mr. Nagle," said the other, "as to directing, no one is entitled to do that. We are all co-operating here, to the best of our ability, for the patient's sake."

"No doubt, no doubt. But the tone that has been assumed by the person upstairs—that sister of yours—is not exactly what it ought to be. And I think, Spooner, you were rather sharp and off-hand in introducing any one without consulting me first."

"But surely you saw the necessity of prompt action. These people had their hired nurses, ready to force them in to the house on us! You know that but for the bold step I took they would have combined to turn you out of the place."

"Turn me out of the place!" said the other, in amazement at this free speech.

"Yes. You know they are the relations. *You* are not in any way connected with him. If I had allowed a common nurse to be put in here, we should have them intriguing, tampering with her, and the poor patient sacrificed. Now we can rely on

my sister Harriet. You see, in whatever light you view it, I was consulting your interests."

This view could not but strike Mr. Nagle, though he still made some grumbling protest about it's being "over smart and sharp." He was not wholly satisfied with the behaviour of the protégé whom he had introduced.

He had scarcely gone away when there was another arrival—Mrs. Gardiner, who crept into the house in a mysterious, sympathising way, and with a sad face asked if she could see "Miss Spooner."

"Tell her I am here, Anne." She had picked up the name of the servant. "Say I would take it as a particular favour if she would come down to me."

In a few moments the cold, stiff Harriet descended. Mrs. Gardiner flew to meet her.

"Oh, Miss Spooner, this is all so dreadful, isn't it? So sorry I couldn't go and call on you before, but I have been so taken up with the children. There was poor little Harry in the measles, and I assure you I went nearly distracted."

"And why should you call on me?" said the other, coldly. "I have no wish that my brother's friends should trouble themselves about me."

"No, of course, quite right of you," said the visitor, not seeing that she was coinciding in a rather uncomplimentary way. Then hurriedly changing the topic; "And how is he going on? Tell me about him. You mustn't overwork yourself, dear Miss Spooner. Promise me that you won't. You might break down, you know. Do you know what William and I were planning last night? We are interested in you, you know. Whenever you can get off

duty you must run up to it as in a morning, or a nip of tea, and rest yourself. I promise me. I'll has set his heart upon it."

"You are very good, but I can do nothing of the kind. My duties are here, and I cannot run from this place."

"Well, I am so glad they have got you," went on the middle lady, "though Mr. Nagle seemed to have made objections. He wished to have some attendant of his own here. I suppose his handsome daughter Corinna. Why it was laughable! She can do nothing but sing her little song and look at her face in the glass."

"I do not know the lady, nor anything about her."

"And how cleverly your brother managed it—so quiet and respectful, and yet so firm. I positively admired him."

The cold nurse answered with less coldness :

"My brother is very clever—few so clever. He will restore the patient to health if anybody will."

"I am sure of it," the other replied, rapturously. "We intend to have him when the children get ill again, instead of Murdoch. But now I want you to say, Miss Spooner, you'll come in to tea—won't you? just in a quiet way, you know—only ourselves. I hear so much of you, and we are all wishing to know you better."

"I regret to have to refuse what would give such pleasure. My duties keep me here. There will be no opportunities for cultivating your acquaintance."

"It is not so much that," said the not-to-be-repulsed lady, "as that I might relieve you here, and you could run down to our house——"

The speaker did not venture to glance at the face of the person she was thus compli-

menting. The other answered with something that seemed like sarcasm :

"Oh! that would not do at all."

Mrs. Gardiner rallied in a moment.

"Ah, I see! You are afraid of that Nagle, who is in command here, and who I don't think is overpleased with your brother. Perhaps he thinks he is not obsequious enough to him. And, do you know, my husband fancies he must be a little sorry now for introducing so clever a man, and that he may try to get him out again."

A curious expression came into Doctor Spooner's sister's eyes ; but she only bowed, and remained silent. Mrs. Gardiner, much disappointed, went on :

"I can tell you the Nagles are all very powerful in this house, as possibly you may find, Miss Spooner."

"I rather think not," said the lady, more

abruptly; "as you may perhaps see later on."

"Well, perhaps so," replied Mrs. Gardiner, with a confidential eagerness. "But when they can set up a barricade against the poor patient's own blood relations there is no knowing what may happen. However, for his sake, I am delighted at what you say."

"What I say! What do you mean, Mrs. Gardiner?"

"I mean that they are not to have it all their own way. I understand your significant hint. I can tell you we don't intend to let ourselves be ejected in this fashion, and proper steps will be taken to set the matter right. However, *you* must not overwork yourself, dear Miss Spooner," added the lady, squeezing the nurse's hand. "We must really know each other better by-and-by."

On this Mrs. Gardiner departed, pretty well satisfied with her visit, and believing that she had sown some seeds of unpleasantness between the doctor and the music-master which would give her opportunity for cultivating a little plant of her own.

That night, after his dinner, Mr. Nagle put up his nightcap, muffler, &c., with a view of passing a long and weary vigil on "the stretcher" beside his suffering friend. As he walked in, as though into his own house, and laid down his carpet-bag on the study-table, Mr. Spooner came down to him.

"Ah, you have come! Of course you heard what the physician said," began that gentleman, "as to the great care required in the case?"

"Oh, to be sure. Poor, poor Doughty! But we'll all pull him through, never fear."

"That is unfortunately what we are not

at all certain of. Your kindness and attention I am sure he ought never to forget should he recover; but as you have such an interest in him, you will feel that not a chance can be allowed to go by. Now that we have a nurse in the house, it seems scarcely necessary that you should harass yourself by sitting up with him."

"My good fellow," said Mr. Nagle, his brows lowering, "what do ye mean? There's no harassing in the business. What are you driving at, sir?"

"Your health is equally valuable to your family, and it is, I say, superfluous that you should go through all this trouble. Everything will be looked after just as well if you sleep at home in your own comfortable bed. In fact, I have sent back the stretcher that you so kindly sent up."

"You have!" said the other, almost

gasping. "Then I tell you what, Spooner, this is going much too far. It's a liberty, sir. Who are you that take on you to make arrangements here? That bed must be brought back. I don't quit this to-night."

"Oh, that I wouldn't venture to interfere with. You have a certain authority in this house."

"Of course I have. Who brought you in here? Do you know your place, sir?"

"I owe that to you, I certainly admit," said the other, humbly; "and, as I say, in the house no one should interfere with you. But the sick-room is my province. If it was my mother or my father, I would behave in the same way. My duty is to restore the patient, if I can, and I can let no consideration of friendship stand in the way. In that I won't be interfered with."

Mr. Nagle stared, grumbled again, but

was on the whole awed by the manner of his protégé. This distinction between the house and the sick-room seemed to him miserably futile, for the only interest that he had was in the sick-room. Still, "the stretcher" had been removed—was at that moment probably in his own hall, and to spend the night pacing about the cold rooms of the house, or lying in an arm-chair, was ridiculous. He was so perplexed and put out by the events of the day, that he knew not how to encounter this fresh and daring opposition. So he went his way home, muttering that he must settle matters with that Spooner, whom he would very soon take "by the scruff of the neck" and put out.

CHAPTER VIII.

PEACHUM AND LOCKIT.

THE fever which had attacked Mr. Doughty had settled on his lungs, oppressing him with a terrible weight and causing him serious exhaustion. For many days he supported a terrible struggle with death. It was presently known that his senses had returned, but that it was doubtful whether he would recover. There was much regret in Brickford when this became known, as he was charitable and generous. The usual desperate remedies had to be resorted

to, to reduce the inflammation. The patient had but little strength, but began to grow more and more conscious and self-possessed.

Mr. Nagle found himself at the house when this change became known.

"I presume, sir," he said, haughtily, to the doctor, "you will not oppose my seeing my friend at this crisis."

"On the contrary," said the doctor. "I was going to send for you, as now that he is coming to himself, the sight of a familiar face will have a good effect."

"Familiar, indeed," snorted the music-master, "and before ever you sent one of your variegated pill-boxes into the place. Take care, sir, you are not hoisted on your own petard. I find it difficult to avoid resenting the way you have behaved to me."

"I had no intention of offending, I as-

sure you," said the other, carelessly; "but if you like you can come to him now, and speak, I beg of you, in a low voice."

This tone of direction grated on Mr. Nagle excessively, but he felt restrained by what he called the "sanctity of the sick-bed," and said nothing. By-and-by, sir, his time would come, that is, "should the man recover"—a favourite phrase of his—and then we would see.

Greatly changed, and greatly wasted, the figure of the prostrate Mr. Doughty was presented to them. He was scarcely able to speak above a whisper. His eyes lighted up at the sight of his friend, as, indeed, Mr. Nagle noticed, though he hardly perceived that it was the association with Corinna that produced this effect. He squeezed Mr. Nagle's hand, and that gentleman was delighted to hear him whisper, "You are not going to desert me. Pro-

mise me—for I have much to say to you."

"Never, never," said Mr. Nagle, returning this testimonial of affection with delight. "You may depend on me." He gave a triumphant glance at the physician, who, however, responded cordially.

"Mr. Nagle is indispensable to us," he said, "and has been most assiduous in watching over you through the crisis. But you are not to talk too much. By-and-by you can do that."

And he gently withdrew Mr. Nagle from the room.

"Now you understand me," he said to him outside, "though you put a wrong construction on the step I was obliged to take yesterday. We must go quietly, and not too fast. The grand point is to protect him from the well-meant irruptions of visitors and others."

"I quite understand you," said Mr. Nagle, with renewed fervour. "The relations are so pushing, there is no keeping them back. They seem to have no decency. They must be kept out at all hazards. What would you say to this, —we might divide the duty,—take it in watches? I would keep guard when you have to go away; you would relieve me, and so on."

"Oh, that's too serious a way of taking it," said the other, coldly. "We don't want to *keep guard*, exactly. People would naturally think we had designs of some sort. No, I'll take care that he shall not be disturbed; and in my absence I can depend on my sister. But as I said, the effect of your name and presence occasionally—and I need not tell you why—will be very valuable."

Again Mr. Nagle felt that he did not

like this sort of thing. There was an air of authority and patronage he did not relish; yet he did not know how to encounter, or set him down. He was disturbed, and put out, and went his way home feeling rather helpless, and muttering often that something must be done with the fellow.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY DUKE IN COUNCIL.

OF all this little band of conspirators—if that be not an inappropriate term for persons who were seeking to carry out their own ends, independently of each other—Lady Duke was perhaps the most experienced and skilful. She was a woman of the world, in a higher sphere of life than the others, and had, besides, been tolerably successful in various schemes, which had presented far greater difficulties than the one now on hand. Thus a great deal was in her favour.

Her intelligence showed her at once that the key of the whole fortress was Doctor Spooner. That Malakhoff would have to be gained, not by assault, but by stratagem. Accordingly, when it was known that the patient was sensible, she determined, without loss of time, to make a private advance on the fortification which had been assailed in concert so fruitlessly a few days before. "He has made no will, that I am convinced of. What then can this man's game be? He can do nothing but obstruct, and cannot hope to get much for himself. The other may die before making his will, or before he has strength enough to make one. If he recovers, this man's whole trouble is wasted. If he has any cleverness his real game would be *to co-operate with the heirs, or with one of the heirs, and make an arrangement with them.*"

Lady Duke did not actually utter these

words, but the ideas passed through her mind again and again.

"If he be the shrewd creature they call him," she thought, "this must have occurred to him long ago. From the Nagles he can expect nothing, as they are so jealous of him——"

As these thoughts were passing through her mind, the servant came to announce that Doctor Spooner was below and wished to see her. The lady smiled, as though some one had paid a tribute to her knowledge of human character.

"It is very kind of you, Doctor Spooner, to come and relieve my anxiety. Sit down," she added, in her most confidential style, "and tell me all about the poor patient."

"You have heard, I suppose, that he is sensible, and so far improving; but still he is in a very critical way."

"Of course," said she. "It is wonderful, indeed, how you have brought him over it so far."

"I can take very little credit in the matter beyond that of—" and he hesitated —"that of guarding him carefully from all disturbing influences which would have been fatal. I have supported him in the water, as I may say; but the question now is to restore animation, and even life."

"Of course you only did your duty. At least I understood it that way."

"Quite so. But now begins the serious difficulty. I come to tell you that I almost feel myself unequal to what I see is before me. How am I to take on myself the duty of resisting the pressure that will be put on me? There are so many well-meaning, eager persons, who are undoubtedly more entitled than I am to assume authority by his bedside—They will override me, that

I can foresee. But it will be my duty to oppose them, and that will place me in a position of geat delicacy and difficulty."

"I am sure," said Lady Duke, haughtily, "as far as I am concerned nothing of the kind can be said of me. This very day, I will venture to say, you have been invaded by the whole tribe of Nagles, Gardiners, and the rest. Where was I? I was determined not to go near the place after the scene of the other day, though I sent my servant to inquire."

The doctor bowed.

"Nothing more lady-like or becoming could be conceived than your conduct. And for that very reason I am here now. From your position and rank, I consider you the head of the relations, and the person whom I ought to consult in this matter. The position—my position—as I said before, is becoming very delicate, and I think

it is not right that all the responsibility should be cast on me. May I speak frankly and in confidence ?"

Lady Duke bowed to him to go on.

"It is no secret here that these Nagles have obtained an extraordinary influence over him. What the foundation of that influence is, you know as well as I do. Now I have reason to believe that they intend to exert that influence presently, in a way that may have most serious results. I understand he has not as yet made any will disposing of his vast property"—

At the mention of this word "Will"—one of the most talismanic of words—Lady Duke gave a very perceptible start.

"A desperate attempt will be made to induce him to make one, even in his present state. That girl will be introduced. They have tried to do so already, but I have opposed them unflinchingly and with

success. From their persistency in this matter, I believe they have never yet got him to sign anything; but he is under some infatuation as to her, and he certainly has, or will have in a day or two, sufficient intelligence to make it extremely difficult to upset such a deed. If I were called upon as a witness, I would not take on myself to swear that he is now incapable of understanding what he was about. But there can be no doubt that, at this moment, he is physically unable to deal with such matters, and that the agitation and excitement would perhaps kill him."

"Then," said Lady Duke, hurriedly, "why should we hesitate a moment? It must be prevented at all risks."

"But how," said the other, quietly; "you see there is the difficulty. An indecent brawl, not at his door, as we had the other day, but round his bed—that would be the

only result. What would you do? What could you do? What would you authorise *me* to do?"

"Why, I should say," answered she, readily, "that it might be a fair case for discretion—and quiet temporising. As you say, another such scene as that of the other day, would be fatal."

"It would not be so difficult to exclude these Nagles altogether; but then, you see, the agitation——"

"Not to be thought of," she said; "they should be met with their own weapons."

"So I think," he said, "for the sake of the patient himself. Your taking this view quite encourages me, Lady Duke."

"But as to his state, do you think he will recover?"

"We must all hope so," he said, with a curious look; "in that case you will have done your duty, and these people will be

more firmly established than ever. They will not, of course, forget any treatment they may have received, but that can't be helped. If, on the other hand, there should be a fatal termination, he will not have been made the prey of comparative strangers, and his relations will not, as is only right, have been stripped of their due inheritance."

Lady Duke reflected a moment.

"This is all very honourable and creditable on your part; but I do not see how you are to be recompensed for so great a service."

"You are quite right. In whatever way the matter is looked at, it will be seen that nothing can come to me. That rather shabby reward, 'the consciousness of having done one's duty,' is all that I can reasonably look for."

"Then what motive——" said Lady

Duke abruptly, "I mean, why should you travel out of your professional course and give yourself so much trouble for nothing?"

He smiled. "You clearly have not much faith in human morality, or in the consciousness of having done one's duty as a satisfactory reward. If," he continued, slowly, "I were to set aside the general interests of the relations, which, as you say, I am not bound to look after particularly, and were to look more to an individual interest, *that* would make a considerable difference. I am struggling at a poor profession, and own I should not be above a substantial acknowledgment—not, observe, for any underground proceedings, but for fair legitimate service; that is, for preventing an indecent scramble among those who are related by blood, and for securing the succession to this inheritance to those who, by their position and rank, are entitled to

represent the family, instead of its going to mere strangers."

Doctor Spooner paused. He saw the fire of avarice in her eyes. She was eager. He had not made a mistake.

"But how—how is it to be managed?"

"By me," he said, "with your assistance. You see this is no combination, as it might vulgarly be considered. We wish merely to defeat the discreditable attempts of others."

"Oh, that I see perfectly," said Lady Duke. "We are for the interests of the deceased—I mean," she said, colouring, "of our patient. It is a proper proceeding; not a word could be said against it. But, of course, the person who brought it all about would look for an exorbitant recompense?"

This she said in an interrogative way. Doctor Spooner answered carelessly:

"That will arise by-and-by, when the part of the work done shall be an earnest for what is to follow. The reward should, of course, be substantial. But the prize is worth it. Neither must it be left to good feeling or generosity, which only produces misconception."

Lady Duke drew up haughtily.

"Oh, I can enter into no bargains of that kind. That is too dangerous a business."

"I do not ask you," he said. "By-and-by you will be pressing and asking me to do so. It will be left to your own choice. You will move in the matter, Lady Duke, never fear. This is merely a little preliminary interchange of ideas. Meanwhile, I have only come to you to ask for advice. I now return to the—I must not say deceased, as you did, Lady Duke—but to the patient."

"I am glad we have come to this wise understanding. It will contribute largely to his benefit."

On this Doctor Spooner took his leave.

Lady Duke, after his departure, sat full of thought, her eyes resting on her table, which was covered with some very forcible stimulants to action, in the shape of bills, and letters pressing for payment of the bills. The family, indeed, was in such a situation, that a crisis was not very far off. Her son had been found perfectly useless as a resource, though something might be done with him later; there was still less to be hoped for from her daughter, who might as well be sent back to the finishing school —only the "lady principal's" letters were the most pressing in the heap of applications on the table. All, therefore, lay with herself; scruples were a luxury, and not to be indulged in at such a crisis. Money

must be had; the family credit of the Dukes must be saved at all risks; and the money of this poor sick Doughty must be left to her.

In a very few minutes she had two or three plans of action before her, and she determined not to lose a moment in trying the first.

CHAPTER X.

LADY DUKE'S MOVE.

THE music-master's daughter, so long the heroine of Brickford, was no mere romantic dreamer, dwelling on her own sufferings with a soft complacency and satisfaction, but was determined to carry out the scheme she had announced. There was in her mind, too, a lofty purpose of self-chastisement—a calm resolve to suffer the fully stern penalty for the light trifling, the vain, careless encouragement by which she had brought suffering on two persons who loved her.

Not that she had now even a remnant of regard or toleration for the young gentleman, whose abrupt departure had made her the object of the smiles, and, in some cases, of the pity of the town. That fashion of withdrawal had revealed to her the cowardice and selfishness of her late admirer, who felt too guilty or too timorous even to explain the reasons for his abandonment of her, and chose to "skulk off" in the way that seemed cheapest, or would cause him least trouble and annoyance with that episode. It was now all over, therefore, and she could look back to it with the most perfect calmness. As for the patient who was lying stricken with sickness, and whose noble devotion to her was being revealed to her more and more as she recalled all that had occurred, her only impulse would have been to have flown to his side, to have watched over

and tended him. "What would be said in Brickford" as to such a proceeding, would have been, perhaps, a challenge to her to carry it out with defiance, and she would have felt a joyful pride in provoking, or even welcoming, their most spiteful criticisms. But she felt that she had deserved punishment, and in stern self-denial and self-sacrifice, was resolved to find it. Going out, therefore, on the world, she would face the practical difficulties of life, and in working her way to success, and perhaps triumph, would leave all the romance of life behind her, and never once look back.

With this resolve she was quietly preparing for her journey, when she was told that Lady Duke wished to see her, and was waiting in the drawing-room.

Corinna went down to her at once. The woman of the world, the mother of the

youth that had behaved so cruelly, looked at her curiously, and then began a sort of apology for her son's behaviour.

"It is long since we have met," she said. "I may frankly tell you that I never approved of the business from the beginning, both for your sake and for his. He is such a changeable creature, and I always told him that he had no right to amuse himself with a mere passing flirtation at your expense."

"If it be for this purpose that you have come to me," said Corinna, haughtily, "I beg that you will not say anything more on the subject. I can assure you it has given me but little distress or uneasiness."

"It delights me to hear you say so," said the lady. "I was sure you would look at the matter in its proper light. Young men will be young men, as we all know."

"That is altogether another view," said Corinna, coldly. "If the matter were to be judged seriously, I think it could not be dismissed quite so lightly as you suppose. I am glad you are here, that I may tell you that I had no feeling for your son beyond being flattered at the attention with which he was pleased to distinguish me. You must allow for my situation—only a poor music-master's daughter. Let us say no more on the subject, if you please."

"With all my heart. Still, you see, I was not so far out in my judgment. You were naturally affected by the very marked partiality shown to you in another quarter. Of course I have no scruple in alluding to this matter. Mr. Doughty's attachment was evident to every one, and the talk of Brickford."

Corinna looked at the lady of quality steadily, and, after a pause, said, calmly:

"Is *this* the subject on which you have come to speak to me?"

A little embarrassed, Lady Duke replied:

"Why, not exactly. I must tell you that I came to hear something as to Mr. Doughty's state. Your father being a sort of ami de la maison, and no one else being admitted to the house,—of course, for all proper reasons,—I come to the fountain head. You are said to be acting like a perfect sister of charity, and but for you it is believed he would never have got over the crisis."

"I have never seen him once since he was taken ill," said Corinna.

"Not once?" said Lady Duke, scanning her narrowly.

"Never," said Corinna. "So much for the value of the reports that you have heard."

"Good gracious! What gossips there are in this place," said Lady Duke, in well-feigned surprise. "There is no end to the stories repeated. He is said to worship you with a sort of dotage. And, indeed, it is supposed that you are to get all his money, for the poor dear sick creature, it is feared, can't be with us very long."

Every word of this speech was a stab to Corinna, sharp stroke after stroke. Her relation to Mr. Doughty, and what was repeated about the place on the subject, had of course been present to her clear eye, but until that moment it had never assumed such a bold and even hideous shape. The picture drawn by Lady Duke almost scared her.

After a moment's pause she said, in a voice which she tried should appear steady, and fixing her eyes on Lady Duke:

"Thank you. I think I appreciate the

motive that has brought you here to tell me all this. I may say that I know it."

The woman of the world grew uncomfortable under that steady gaze, and felt more guilty than she had done for many years.

"But it does not touch me; not in the least. If I cared for your opinion, I would know that you are paying me a sort of compliment; for you know well what you intend to be the effect of what you have just said. But you might have spared me, and spared yourself, the humiliation. I had determined to quit this place before you came in. I leave here to-morrow morning."

Lady Duke gave a genuine start of surprise.

"I am not flying from ill-nature. If I chose to be insensible, I would prefer to stay, and let you find out, and feel, what

real power I have. But what I cannot endure is—— But no matter. I go. There is my trunk, packed and corded, as you may tell all your Brickford friends."

Lady Duke was crushed; her pleasure at the withdrawal of such a dangerous rival was overpowered in her wonder at what "the girl could be at." She could only rise and murmur:

"Well, this is really wonderful, and shows a very proper feeling. It is quite Spartan of you, and indeed I must say that you have behaved very fairly through the affair."

So she determined that she would say, of course, to the patient, or to those likely to repeat her speech to the patient. Treading on air, as the phrase goes, and full of exaltation at this unexpected removal of an obstacle, she took her leave; and almost before she reached the street

this veteran schemer had a new plan ready, which she prepared to execute at once, and for that purpose set off straight to Mr. Doughty's house.

CHAPTER XL

ALLIANCE.

A MORNING or two later Mr. Nagle was "junketing down," as he called it, to the sick man's house, when he saw Lady Duke entering, in a highly surreptitious manner. He smiled, half in contempt, half in enjoyment. "Some people," he thought, "are strangely pachydermatous. Here is a woman that has been snubbed and re-snubbed at that establishment. There is a positive indecency in such persistence. She'll never

make anything of it, if she were to put her eyes upon sticks."

He was devising a sarcastic speech to this effect, when the door was opened, and he was admitted.

No Lady Duke was in the drawing-room, no Lady Duke in the parlour. What did this mean? The doctor entered. Mr. Nagle, fiery with excitement and suspicion, began to bluster:

"What is this, and what is the meaning of this, Spooner—this holing and cornering, and finessing—smuggling in some parties, and excluding others?"

"You have some odd phrases, Mr. Nagle," said the other, "and which, I am sure, go beyond your meaning. Mr. Doughty specially asked to see Lady Duke."

"Asked to see the woman! I don't believe it. Let me see *him*. If the man's

capable enough to see her, he's capable enough to see *me.* I tell you what, sir, I *know* there's a game going on here. Let me pass at once."

"Pardon me," said the other, standing in the doorway; "I cannot permit it—at least not now. I have no doubt that he will see you later, and if he express the least desire, I can assure you you shall be admitted."

"I shall be admitted! Thank ye, sir! Well, and who gave you the right to set yourself up as captain or commander-in-chief here? I see your game, sir; you want to kick down the ladder on which you scrambled up."

"I think you must see, Mr. Nagle, that more of this language will bring about unpleasantness, and prejudice your interests materially. I can make due allowance for your excitement up to a certain point, but I

am sure you will be wise, and see, on reflection, that you are pursuing a most imprudent course."

This did strike our professor, and he moderated his tone.

"But my good sir, when I see one woman let in and another excluded—my dear child, Corinna, for whom the man would give his last breath—why should we have this tabooing of some, with the letting in of others by back doors?"

"You are quite right as to your daughter, and have given the precise reason why it would be most objectionable to admit her—as yet, at least. He must not be agitated. Take my advice, come back later."

Mr. Nagle went away. He took the advice, repaired straight to Will Gardiner's, and found husband and wife at home, who received him rather coldly. Will Gardiner could never disguise re-

sentment where he felt he had been "done."

"I wonder you have come off guard, Nagle," he said. "Arn't you afraid that some of the relations may slip in during your absence?"

"Oh, I am not guarding, or doing anything of that sort. I can tell you there's fine scheming going on up there—doors double-locked and barred, and every one asked their business. I never heard of such a thing in my life!"

Mr. Nagle spoke pettishly. Mr. Gardiner saw how things stood; his face wore a broad grin of amusement.

"What, has Master Spooner turned on *you*—shown you the door, eh! my poor professor? Put not your trust in princes, my boy, no, nor in doctors either."

"I tell you what," said Mr. Nagle, solemnly, and not heeding, or, perhaps,

understanding these compliments, "my opinion is, there is some scheming on foot up there. It's really most suspicious. There's the woman brought in—a regular Cerberus—never sleeps, I believe; locked doors; and no one let to set foot on the stair."

"But *you*, my dear Nagle, the bosom friend and pitcher—why no one could believe it! And Miss Corinna—surely she has the pass-key if any one has."

"*There's* the monstrous part of it," said Mr. Nagle, vehemently. "I appeal to you and Mrs. Gardiner if it wasn't notorious in the place. The man idolised her; and to have the door slammed in her face by a fellow that ought to be grinding his powders in a back shop——"

"Oh," said Mrs. Gardiner, "so *she* has been attempting to visit him. Dear me!

how trying for her to have been refused admission."

"No, I didn't mean that," he answered, hastily. "I assure you, no. She hasn't been near the place. In fact, she has a delicacy about it which I think is perfectly ridiculous."

"Of course you would not like to have it repeated," replied the lady; who, nevertheless, told everywhere how that scheming girl had tried to force herself in and could not get beyond the hall.

"Well," said Will, enjoying the joke immensely, "it's unfortunate for you, Master Nagle. But, you see, a position like yours is always more or less insecure —perhaps rather more than less. The only comfort you can have is that poor old Doughty may get well, and then Spooner will be sent to the right-about himself, just as you are."

This was brutal, and Mr. Nagle winced.

"I am *not* sent to the right-about, as you call it. The real danger is that the man may not recover, and they may be concocting wills, and deeds, and all sorts of knavery."

"It won't stand," said Will, excitedly. "I tell you it shan't stand. If I was to spend every halfpenny I have on earth I'll upset it. The relations shall get up a fund, and work heaven and earth. No court would tolerate such an iniquitous plot. But do you know, Nagle, in any case things look rather blue for you, my boy. And after all your trouble, too!"

"Yes," said the other, "my practice ruined—my professional emoluments dwindling away——"

"Dwindling!" said Mrs. Gardiner, in good-natured surprise. "Why, every one in Brickford believes that you are coining."

"Oh, that's all very well, ma'am. There's not much to coin in this wretched hole. Why, if you only knew the slave I have been to that man, and Corinna too, putting up with his humours and jealousies, and losing a good match too."

"You may thank my Lady Duke for that," said Will. "But you had another crumb of comfort there. She got the sack, if you did——"

"No! there's the game—the partiality! It's monstrous. Why, I believe she has bought that fellow, Spooner, and she's sitting with the man this moment."

Will Gardiner started up, his cheeks glowing.

"*She* got in! Then depend upon it they're all in league. I see it now. A regular plant! Lock up the poor devil, keep out every one that feels well towards him! Poor deserted, demented creature!

Heaven help him if he gets into her hands."

"But what's to be done?" said Mrs. Gardiner. "That woman isn't to be tolerated. *We* have as good a right to be there as she has."

"I tell you what, Nagle, leave it to my wife, who is a wonderful woman of the world. She'll soon let these people know what she thinks of them."

Mr. Nagle shook his head.

"Oh! you don't know her," said Will enthusiastically. "She's just the woman for a situation like this. She'll be a match for them all. There'll be no will concocted without her knowing it. And then your girl, Corinna—why, she's a tower of strength —surely she ought to be with him!"

"Oh, there it is," said Mr. Nagle. "She has got some absurd delicacy in her head about the people, and what they would

say: that she was scheming to get his money."

"Nonsense! Why, that's said often enough already. Their tongues are never idle a moment. As she's got the credit of it, she might as well have the reality. You should use your authority. These girls require to be ordered about."

"But what can I do with her?" said the other. "She's so high-flown and romantic. Why—would you believe it?—I forgot to tell you this—she wants to go away! to leave the place!"

Mrs. Gardiner started.

"Go away! When?"

"At once. To-morrow, she says. Talks of earning her bread, and all that folly."

"Oh, then it looks very bad indeed. After that you may draw off, and let the others pillage the poor fellow to their heart's content."

Mr. Nagle looked frightened.

"Why so? How d'ye mean?"

"Why, my dear Master Nagle, you don't suppose he'd do anything for *you!* It's for your handsome girl he's been fraternising with you. Is it possible that you haven't seen that all along?"

This disagreeable truth had never occurred to the music-master; but it seemed to be now put so logically that it flashed upon him with something like conviction.

"Then it's most ungrateful and selfish of her."

"Oh! I suppose she knows best," said Mrs. Gardiner. "She's a heroine, you know, and I never could understand heroines. There's nothing then to be done. If she were my daughter, I would certainly insist on her remaining, for a time, at least. You have some authority over your children, I suppose?"

"Oh, I am sure I don't know," said Mr. Nagle, in despair. "I suppose they do as they please. That's the cue for the new generation, it seems."

Mrs. Gardiner looked at him with some contempt.

"Well, I am sure!" she said, "with such cards in your hand! But no matter. You know what are your interests best."

"Then, tell me what I am to do," he said, looking helplessly from one to the other.

"Well," said Will, "I would make her stay for a short time at least. I suppose she has some natural affection, and will do something for her poor old father. I would work that line to her. If that fails, insist on it."

This seemed to comfort the music-master a little, who presently seized his hat and set off for his home.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BARRIER CROSSED.

NOT very long after Braham Nagle's departure, Will Gardiner and his wife left their house, and went forth to make a fresh attack on the Doughty fortress. It was curious to see the alteration in that honest, open face, an eagerness and restlessness having come into his eyes, and a worn look on his cheeks. He had become harassed with that one thought, and at home could talk of nothing else. From constant talking, what was a wild day-dream had come first, to assume

probability, then almost certainty, and this was fed by his oft-repeated assurance to himself and his wife :

"Why haven't we as good a chance as any of them ? We have never shown that we wanted the poor fellow's money, or curried him for it."

It was curious how often this description "poor fellow" was introduced as a sort of corrective to the fear of being thought mercenary. But, as in the case of Lady Duke, circumstances had become pressing, and Will Gardiner, too, living beyond his means, was sadly in want of money.

It was unfortunate that his more clever wife should have left him on their road to the house to do some shopping; for thus he arrived in a sort of combative mood, which was not likely to advance their interests. He strode in and was walking up-stairs, when he was confronted by the

doctor, with his usual mysterious and cautionary manner. At this he lost all patience.

"Now look here, Spooner," he said, "you had better give up this ridiculous game at once. I tell you plainly, I am not going to put up with it. Am I to understand that you mean to play policeman and shut me out from seeing our relation Doughty when I like?"

The other was almost servile in his protestations.

"Far from it. As soon as he gets a little strength, I shall be only too happy to admit you. Even if he were to desire to see you now, I should make no objection. But the truth is he has really never done so."

"I suppose," said Will, with a sneer, "he will only desire to see such persons as are Doctor Spooner's friends. What a

curious coincidence! Now do you think we are going to stand this nonsense; or do you suppose that every one doesn't see through your schemes? I tell you what, I believe it to be a conspiracy—nothing more or less."

"You are excited," said the other, "but you will not excite me. Mr. Gardiner, your manner and language justify me now in saying that you are a most improper person to be admitted to a sick-room where a patient like mine is in so critical a way."

Will Gardiner was beside himself with anger.

"Why, what authority have you here? I tell you I shall insist on my right of seeing my friend, whom you may be hocussing between you, for all anyone knows. Let me pass, sir!"

Mr. Gardiner had not much self-restraint, and seizing the doctor by the collar, swung

him out of his way. Then he hurried upstairs to the bedroom. He had nearly reached the door, when he was confronted by the stern sister, who, with one hand on the banister and another on the wall, completely barred the way.

"For shame, sir!" she said, coldly; "this is indecent. Do you want to burst into the sick man's room? You will first have to assault me as you have done my brother."

"Oh, stand away, ma'am!" said Will, in a fury with himself, for having got into such a position. "I suppose you will next spread that about, or tell Mr. Doughty that I have done so?"

"Come, sir, you must go down," said the doctor, who had now come up quietly behind, "or it will be my duty to call for assistance, and have you removed."

"At your peril," said Will, with his hand

on the door of the room. "You will not dispose of me so easily, I can tell you."

All at once the door was opened, and a pale face looked out, overcast with doubt and astonishment. The whole was, indeed, a picture, a group from a comedy, and the various characters—for Mrs. Gardiner had now arrived—looked not a little humiliated.

"What is all this about?" said the patient, wearily.

Will spoke out bluntly, and with a natural warmth.

"I'm delighted to see you again, and looking so fresh, Doughty, really delighted. We were told that you were at the last extremity, and I was trying to see for myself, only this good gentleman here wanted to prevent us."

Mr. Doughty answered, with wild eyes, and much excited—

"Do not be quarrelling here; I will *not* be hunted in this fashion. Go away, every one of you. I don't want you. I'm sure I ought to be delighted to find all here so interested in me!"

The doctor had turned rather pale, but spoke firmly—

"A great responsibility was cast on me, and I was determined, at any risk of misconstruction, to do my duty to you, as my patient."

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Doughty, peevishly. "I know that. Every one wants to do their duty by me, it seems."

"We do, I know," said Mrs. Gardiner, promptly. "We have been here day after day, but were not allowed to get beyond the door. Even the poor Nagles," she added, very adroitly, "have been turned away."

The patient started. "Not by my direc-

tion. Where are they? When was she here?"

"It is of Mr. Nagle that this gentleman is speaking of," said the sister. "His daughter has never been here once."

"Come in," said Mr. Doughty, sharply, to the two Gardiners. "I am ill, very ill. But no one has a right to shut me up in this style. I so want to talk to you."

"Then you wait outside, dear," she said to her husband. "Both of us will only tire him; and I can tell him everything he wishes to hear."

This was meant as a wise precaution against the two conspirators listening at the key-hole. To say the truth, Mr. Doughty did not seem to notice the absence of Will Gardiner.

"Now, what is all this?" he said, when the door was closed. "I know nothing of what has been going on during this illness

of mine; but, I fear, very much that I am not accountable for. Were they complaining to you?"

"Miss Corinna?" said Mrs. Gardiner, delicately assisting him. "No; she is not a girl likely to do that, especially if she saw there was anything like a combination, or that unworthy motives were imputed to her. That alone would keep her at a distance."

"A cruel delicacy," said he, warmly; "cruel to me, who both like and esteem her. She might, at least, have done what all the rest of the world here seems to have done. I could not, of course, expect her to show such a flattering interest in my poor self as the struggle that has just taken place outside; but still a visit, a poor inquiry, could not have done her much harm."

"Well, perhaps she had some good

reason. Perhaps she might think that, after the late business, in which young Mr. Duke behaved so badly—and you know they are all so unkind in this place."

He was getting more and more interested.

"I can quite understand that," he said; "and of course she could hear every day from her father—if she cared to know, that is. But the people of this place certainly bear her no good will."

"She has enemies," said the lady, "and no one to protect her. Lady Duke bears her no love, and is a very clever woman. No one knows better how to contrive matters. She certainly managed to rescue her son, as she would call it, with great skill. He is not a youth of much strength of mind, and she knows how to direct him without his being aware of it."

Mr. Doughty remained silent, looking at

her steadily. "I suspected something of all this," he said at length; "and I suppose this is what is repeated about in the place."

"Oh, yes," she said, eagerly; "and a vast deal more."

"Then we must try and set things straight as far as we can. I may not live very long; I am not exactly young, and you know they always call me 'Old Doughty.' But I have strength still to show that noble girl what I think of her, as well as of those who have shown themselves her friends. You and yours, my dear Mrs. Gardiner, have been so from the beginning. It was at your house I first saw her. It was you and your husband that first took notice of the poor unfriended music-master and his daughter. I notice these things, though I may not seem to do so. Her friends shall be my friends. I

wish you to know that, and bear it in mind. Those who remember her I shall remember, in the vulgar but satisfactory sense of the word. I think I can depend on you."

"How generous, how noble!" said Mrs. Gardiner, hardly able to restrain her delight.

"You have some influence with her, I dare say?" he went on doubtfully. "As you can see, I am so beleaguered and hedged in here with interested people, I can find no one whom I can trust. If she would only come to me—if I could see her but for a few moments—"

"Nothing more easy in the world," said Mrs. Gardiner, enthusiastically. "I'll undertake to manage it."

"No, no," said he, doubtfully, "it is a delicate matter, and she is so very sensitive."

"Leave it all to me. I shall contrive

it. It is only proper that she should come to one who has shown such a generous interest in her all through. Indeed, as it is," continued Mrs. Gardiner, unable to repress her natural inclination to give a thrust to any fellow-creature when she could, "it rather surprises me that she should stand aloof in this remarkable way, as if she were afraid of catching the plague. To some people it would seem ungracious; only we, of course, know her better."

"You do not," said he quietly, "and some people—most people, indeed—cannot understand such things. However, if she could only be brought to pay one little visit to a poor shattered invalid, out of charity, even as a sister of mercy, which she is, I shall be for ever grateful."

She listened to these comforting words with much elation. Her tactics, such as they were, had so far been crowned with

infinite success. She had struck out the true course. And certainly it would seem —and the reader may think so too—that Lady Duke had made a sad blunder in joining herself to the weaker party. Corinna and the Gardiners were certainly likely to be more powerful than Lady Duke, the doctor, and his sister.

Mrs. Gardiner came out of the sick-room with triumph, and, in the drawing-room, met Lady Duke, who was waiting for her audience, and chafing a good deal at the delay. That lady noticed this air of success, and was troubled. Already she had misgivings, for the news of the successful Gardiner irruption, the carrying the outworks, and sweeping away of the doctor and his sister, had reached her. The enemy had got within the gates.

But a fresh rebuff was in store for her. The doctor came down with a sort of rue-

ful face, with word that Mr. Doughty would not see her now. She knew, by a sort of instinct, that "the other woman" had been poisoning his mind, and saying something to her detriment. The Gardiner party had now scored one, and there was consternation in the looks of the other side, as the successful lady tripped away to report her success.

But before night arrived, another startling piece of intelligence had got abroad. Birkenshaw, the private solicitor of the Gardiners, had gone up to Mr. Doughty—sent, of course, by "that party"—for the purpose of drawing up his last will and testament, by which all that he had in the world would be given to those miserable Nagles, with a jackal's slice to the Gardiners, who had helped so effectively to secure the spoil. Here was news, indeed!

CHAPTER XIII.

RUMOURS OF THE WILL.

SOME domestic news that reached Lady Duke had not put her in the best of humours. The mail had brought her a letter from her dear son with news that he was still in the country. The Transport screw steamer had broken down a day's journey from port, and had to put back. She would not be fit for sea, and while waiting, the youth had "run up" to town. He was in want of cash, and wished his dear mother to send him some with all speed.

"Always selfish," said the dear mother. "Where does he suppose that I am to find money? Everybody harassing me for money." Then the image of the sick Doughty rose before her—her eyes always turning impatiently in that direction, and seeking relief there. This had really become a sort of morbid image that could not be shut out, and from constantly dwelling on it, she had come to regard it as almost a certainty.

The young man, careless of the troubles, then told her some gossip. He was asked out to "no end" of parties—the favourite military phrase, and of course stated in the same special dialect that he was going to be "awfully" jolly. His mother, with such great anxieties on her soul, read these details impatiently, and tossed aside the letter.

"I never shall make anything of him,"

she said. "He will be of no use to me."

Then she turned to greater interests.

Lady Duke and one of the conspirators met that night, Doctor Spooner having come over to see her.

"Birkenshaw," he said, with something like consternation, "has gone away, taking with him the heads of the instructions. The deed will be ready for execution to-morrow."

"What is to be done?" asked the lady.

"I really think that he believes he will not live," said the other.

"And are those Nagles to have it all? Surely we are not going to accept such a state of things."

"It will be regularly executed, and I suppose they will apply for probate,"—he paused. "Nothing can be done till then,"

he added, slowly, "if anything *can* be done then."

"Nothing can be done till then," she repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, "that we can do nothing *now*, Lady Duke. Things must take their course. It would not be proper to oppose him in this notion—he is determined upon it—and it would only increase his state of nervous excitement."

"And he *is* excited?" she asked, eagerly, "nervously so?"

"If you had been there to-day," he answered, "and unfortunately you were not, you would have thought his manner strange, very singular indeed. He burst out of his room, and, what with his wild eyes and incoherent manner, I really could not tell what would be the next step. I did my best to keep those people from

him, as I knew what the effect would be. I warned them again and again."

Lady Duke remained silent for a few moments. Then she said:

"From beginning to end this Nagle business is a perfect infatuation. It is a mania. Any court would say so. No man in his right mind could be so weak. But of course the Nagle party, and those Gardiners, don't think so. It would not be their interest to do so. What about this solicitor he has sent for?"

"He is said to be an upright man, respected in his profession, of good birth, but married in low life. The genteel people here have made a dead set against him in consequence. I believe it is for that very reason that Mr. Doughty sent for him. The ladies of this place 'turn up their noses,' as it is called, at her."

Lady Duke reflected a little on this piece

of information. She was not displeased to find herself being gradually drawn into a situation so favourable to all her gifts of intrigue, which indeed for many years now had lain fallow. One or two of the watering-places had long ago been the scene of her exertions, when she had plotted against rival patronesses of society, and had acquired a certain fashionable unscrupulousness. Now her social moral sense had become blunted, the old keenness was awakened, and she eagerly seized the materials now presented to her, as something that would give practice to these old disused faculties.

"We should see this gentleman," she said, "and some notice should be taken of him and of his family."

CHAPTER XIV.

CORINNA'S FLIGHT.

THE news that Birkenshaw had been sent for by Mr. Doughty of course with the object of making "a settlement of his worldly affairs"—elegant and tender circumlocution for making one's will—spread with rapidity through Brickford. In the wake of this piece of news followed another, of even more interest, for it was openly stated in the market place, as it were, that all his handsome fortune had been bequeathed to Corinna Nagle. There was, of course, no

official announcement to this effect, such news, however interesting, not being usually given out before the proper time; but an infallible instinct, which in the present case might be relied on, told every one that such was the disposition. Lucky girl! Enviable, scheming, cunning creature, that "played her cards so knowingly all the time!" Well, if any one there had a daughter of that kind, who would stoop to carrying out such a game, they would not be compensated for such a disgrace by any money in the world, thank Heaven! Some parents were inhuman enough on the whole rather to prefer that she should be in her grave than see her enriched by such arts. However, "there it was." The will was made, Corinna was of course the heiress, and the next thing was to see how the girl bore her fortune.

Lady Duke was the foremost in this in-

quisitive purpose, and on the news went boldly to the Nagle mansion. She had plenty of courage, and was not in the least afraid to confront these enemies. At the door she saw a fly waiting; a trunk was brought down past her as she ascended the steps; while across the hall stamped and strode an infuriated man, flourishing his long arms, and talking loudly. In his blind excitement, he actually welcomed the arrival of Lady Duke as that of a valued ally.

"Just come in here, ma'am," he said, "and say what you think of this piece of idiotcy. Look at that girl—where has she gone to now? She's mad, or losing her wits. She ought to be in the hands of keepers, so she ought. I can do nothing with her."

"What is all this about?" asked the lady, coldly.

"It's about, and about, and about," he answered, incoherently; he himself really seeming to require the restraint he spoke of. "Why here she's going away. Going up to London—abroad—God knows where, and at such a moment."

Lady Duke understood him perfectly, but affected astonishment. The next moment Corinna had entered, in her travelling dress, and regarded the visitor haughtily.

"Say something to her," continued Mr. Nagle, quite beside himself with agitation. "There never was such folly. When all is settled now, and she may live like a princess for the rest of her life!"

"For Heaven's sake!" said Corinna, imploringly, "do not add to our mortification at such a moment by talking in that style. As I am going away, and nothing

can change my purpose, let me do so without confusion or disgrace."

"Oh, you mean," said Lady Duke maliciously, "this story about Mr. Doughty's will. Every one is certainly talking about it, and will be coming to congratulate presently. It is certainly a most flattering compliment, and a wonderful piece of good fortune."

"Exactly what I say, my lady," said Mr. Nagle. "There's sense! There's rationality! All this fiddle-de-dee romance and sensitiveness is ridiculous. Why it's throwing away—it's—it's"—added he, at a loss for a word—"it's like Bedlamites broke loose! Don't you think so?"

"Oh, my opinion is not worth much, at least with Miss Nagle, who I am afraid does not judge me very favourably. But I may say this, that when now the prize has been secured, it is scarcely worth while

to draw back. For a hundred thousand pounds one might put up with some unpleasant remarks."

"Exactly what I say," said Mr. Nagle; "my very words."

Corinna was looking at the visitor with a searching glance that made the lady uncomfortable.

"I understand—I perfectly understand," she said. "Yours has always indeed been disinterested advice. My father, though he is so grateful for your support of his views, does not perhaps see what you are really aiming at. On this occasion you shall succeed, and the dear wishes of your heart be carried out, though you know not how, as yet."

"You are unjust to me, Miss Nagle," said Lady Duke, somewhat confused; "but I should not have interfered at all in the matter."

"If I were the designing person that you and the people here would make me out, should you not see me remaining? My conduct speaks for itself. It, at all events, looks disinterested. Now, father, I must really go. Good-bye."

It was time for Lady Duke to withdraw. Indeed, Mr. Nagle was a picture of rage and despair; and it was perhaps best that only members of his family should witness his wild ebullitions. At the corner of the street she waited, saw Corinna get into the fly, and drive away to the railway.

"Thank goodness, thank goodness!" said her ladyship with more devotion than she uttered aspirations in a church. "We have got rid of her. Now the ground is getting clear."

CHAPTER XV.

NEW ALLIES.

A QUARTER of an hour later arrived Mrs. Gardiner, who found the bereaved Nagle almost tearing his hair with vexation. The lady was smiling and full of the good news she brought.

"I have come to carry off Corinna. Where is she? Poor dear Doughty insists on seeing her. She will do him more good than all the doctors."

"My good lady, what are you talking about? Don't you know that the girl is

gone—left me, her father! It's ridiculous —monstrous—childish—scandalous!"

"Gone away!" said Mrs. Gardiner, genuinely astonished.

"Yes, gone altogether—for ever, ma'am."

"And at such a time! Then it's all over with your chances. Those Dukes will have it their own way now. What infatuation!"

Mrs. Gardiner did not care to remain listening to the dismal laments of the baffled musician, but hurried at once to Mr. Doughty's. On the road, however, the news did not appear so disastrous, and by the time she reached his door, she made the same reflection, almost in the same words, as Lady Duke had used, that, "thank goodness, the ground was being cleared." The removal of the dangerous Corinna was indeed to be a relief for all parties—and, alas! for the loyalty of the

late alliance, she was delighted to throw over "those Nagles" for good and all. She had prepared her part already. The invalid watched her face with a wistful expectancy.

"Well, the news?" he said. "Tell me the news. Good? She is coming to me? No!"

His face fell; but the unscrupulous lady was determined to perform the operation with the mercilessness of a surgeon.

"She has behaved cruelly, infamously. She can have no feeling."

"Who? Corinna?"

"Yes. What can you think of her? She has gone. Left you and the place for ever. It looks as if she had a positive hatred of you."

He sank back in his chair with a stupefied look.

"She was told all that you had done for

her so nobly ; but all had no effect. I give her up after this. She is not worth thinking of."

"So ends the infatuation," he said. "Poor old fool that I have shown myself."

"Old !" murmured Mrs. Gardiner. "What nonsense ! She was not worthy of you."

"Yes, old and imbecile. It serves me right; I could see that she considered my liking and admiration a sort of affront. What right had an elderly, commonplace being, to think of her, the divine Corinna, who keeps her affections for the young and the handsome ?"

"What right ! You were above her in every way. No, believe me, this is not the mere pride of poverty, but there is something radically wrong in the girl. She thinks she can best secure all she wants from your partiality, in this way,

without sacrifice of her particular inclinations."

This artful speech had its effect.

"What inclinations?" he said, half rising, and then falling back from exhaustion; "no, she could not be so artful, so cruelly artful. It would be devilish. She might have waited for decency's sake until the grave had closed over me. It would not be for long."

"Yes, and then she could follow her own affections, and enjoy love and money together."

"Never!" he said, snatching at some papers that were on the table. "See, here is the deed I was childish enough to have drawn out. It is only the draft. She has not got it on parchment as yet, nor have I attached my poor trembling signature. There," he continued, tearing it across deliberately, "that fit is over for ever. It

was a short, though a violent one; but it is over at last."

Mrs. Gardiner saw this act of destruction with some consternation, for it involved some sacrifice of her private interests. She felt that though "the ground was cleared" it was done in almost too wholesale a manner. The greater tree was cut down and cleared away, but her little shrub might have been left standing. Mr. Doughty noticed her rueful expression.

"Don't be afraid," he said, bitterly; "you and your party shall not suffer from that."

"Oh, I was not thinking of that," she said, with some economy of truth.

"Oh, but you were!" he said, sarcastically. "You all are. No matter, perhaps it will not make so much difference after all, as I mean to get well now. I must vindicate myself, and prove myself no longer the idiotic being the public has

supposed me to be. No longer a cat's-paw, a weak, confiding creature, that will put up with any treatment. Henceforth, those who are friendly to me I shall treat as friends."

He was growing very agitated, his eyes were very wild indeed.

"You hinted something," he went on, "as to the motive of this young lady's flight. You said she had gone in the direction her inclinations led her. Can it be supposed that this is the old attraction? This would at least make things intelligible."

Mrs. Gardiner was a little embarrassed, but such a chance of embittering his resentment was too good to be neglected, so she answered diplomatically:

"Well, you may be sure that such is what is believed in this place, and indeed it looks like the only rational solution."

"Oh, is not such devotion refreshing!

But the deception—the cruel deception—and the organised, determined purpose with which she pursued this end! It might seem very disinterested, this unflinching determination; but it is too noble, too cold, too much of duty. However, there, I must see it ended now. I tell you it is over for ever, and I wish there were more here to listen, and hear me say that there *shall* be an end of it. Who is there? Let them all come in."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONFUSION WORSE CONFOUNDED.

HERE was the irrepressible Lady Duke come off, hot foot, to begin operations, now that "the ground was cleared." She looked a little disconcerted when she saw that Mrs. Gardiner was already "on the ground" before her; and the two ladies sniffed a reciprocal hostility.

Mr. Doughty seemed to overflow with bitterness, and a sort of quiet fury; while his eyes sparkled with eagerness.

"It is amazing how unceasing all my

relations have been in their attendance during my illness," he said; "but I will show my gratitude to them in some way. Look at all these chests that have come down from London. They contain jewels, books, family papers, what not. They are all part of the estate, and, when I am removed from this mortal sphere, must be distributed among my heirs. I dare say you may not have long to wait. Eh, Lady Duke, are you getting impatient?"

"Oh!" said that lady, shocked at the imputation; "surely you do not think so badly of me!"

"What would you have me think of all the world after the way I have been treated? There are people in this place who cannot be even bribed to come near a poor sick dying being for fear of compromising themselves. *That* is a spectacle of virtue, which, I must say, not one of you

could have imitated. I don't want you to do so. But I am going now to be generous, and to take care of my own flesh and blood. As a beginning, Lady Duke, do you see that heap of torn-up papers? There is the draft of my will. But now I must take care of you all. First, tell me," he said to Lady Duke, "has your son quitted England as yet?"

"No," said that lady. "But I had a letter from him this morning. I believe the sailing of his vessel has been postponed."

He started up.

"I knew it! It is now all as clear as daylight. Of course, he did not write to you that she had gone to meet him. Was there ever such an instance of an overpowering passion!"

For a moment Lady Duke was confounded by this statement. But she had

penetration enough to see how the matter really stood, and, like Mrs. Gardiner, inflamed this new delusion by an artful suggestion.

"I did not think of that! But no! she could not be so abandoned to all sense of propriety, and even decency!"

"Love will do anything," he said, "What do you want now?"

A servant came in to say that Mr. Nagle was waiting below. At this name Mr. Doughty winced, and almost shivered.

"Take any shape but that," he said. "No, I can't see him; I am hardly in the vein to receive any one bearing that name. Tell him not at present, but some other time. I do think that the sight of that poor musician, and the allusions he would make to his child, would really overturn my brain, which now someway seems to me to be only just nicely balanced.

Pray leave me now. Do, I implore of you!"

They all went their way, interchanging some curious looks.

On the stairs they met the doctor.

"He is really very odd," said Lady Duke. "His mind seems quite unsettled by this shock."

The doctor shook his head.

"I have long been dreading this," he said. "The news should have been broken to him gently."

"Oh," said Lady Duke, in defence of her new ally, "I am sure Mrs. Gardiner took every care about that. He must have known it sooner or later."

Mrs. Gardiner gave her a grateful look, and squeezed her hand.

"But I really think," continued Lady Duke, "he should not be much left alone. His manner was singularly wild. Are you

aware that he has torn up the will?" she added, in a low voice. "Mrs. Gardiner saw him do it."

"I can swear to that," said that lady, in a low voice. "He raved about being deserted and betrayed by that girl; then snatched up the papers and tore them furiously into shreds. And his words as he did so, were—'See, this was intended for *her*. But I'll be a fool no longer.' And I can assure you that he looked and spoke like a maniac as he did so."

The three conspirators gazed at each other with a curious meaning in their face.

"Do you think, Dr. Spooner," asked Lady Duke, hesitatingly, "that a crisis like this is likely to make him worse, or—would it expend itself, and wear out?"

"From morbidly dwelling on it, he would be likely to grow worse," said the doctor. "I should not be at all surprised if, after

to-night, we should see a change in him. I really begin to fear so."

The conspirators were thus whispering with heads bent close together, when a voice came from below stairs which made them start.

"I say, Spooner, *are* you coming down? Am I to be kept below here all day?"

It was Mr. Nagle.

"This man here again," said Lady Duke. "What effrontery!"

"The coolest piece of assurance!" said Mrs. Gardiner.

"Well, after all," said the doctor, "we must make some allowance; he is not so much to blame. I'll speak to him. I know how to manage him. May I ask you to go away now?"

The two ladies looked at him suspiciously. In such exciting times every one felt suspicion, and the most indifferent

action might assume the most varied complexion according to the views of the lookers on.

"Yes, you had better go away," said the doctor, impatiently. "You may depend on me."

They descended, and passed Mr. Nagle with a haughty bow. That gentleman had lost all restraint, and was really desperate.

"Fine work this," he said. "I know the game that is hatching up-stairs. But I'll be a witness against the whole set. Don't think I've been hoodwinked all this time. Don't think that I can't see what you are plotting."

"Sir!" said the two ladies.

"If there be law in the land I'll not see my child schemed and humbugged out of her rights. There *is* a will, made and executed securing 'em to her; and if it's

not forthcoming at the proper time, I'll have the law. Ah! you thought you had got rid of us; but I can tell you you are all mistaken."

The ladies gave him a haughty look of contempt, and swept away past him.

Thus the Nagle-Gardiner alliance was dissolved almost as suddenly as it was formed, while a new one, the Duke-Gardiner, had been constituted.

As soon as the door was closed upon them the doctor took Mr. Nagle mysteriously aside.

"He does not want to see you," he said, in a low voice, "I assure you he said so a moment ago."

"I don't believe a word of it," said the musician.

"Polite! Then you can go up if you wish. Only, I entreat you, do be moderate in your behaviour. He himself said,"

added the doctor, with meaning, "and before three witnesses, that the sight of any one bearing your name would overset his brain."

The music-master stared wildly. It had begun to force itself on his rather narrow faculties, that a mysterious chain of events was being somehow woven about him, and that skilful hands were raising up impenetrable barriers between him and the object of all his hopes. For the first time he began to feel that he was rather a helpless creature.

Somewhat cowed, he answered:

"Of course I should not like to have any bad effect upon him; but it is very hard that I should be shut out in this way. It's notorious to the country! I, in whose favour—or at least in that of my child, but it's all the same thing, you know—a will has been executed. She's his heiress, and

in her absence I'm duly constituted trustee, or as good."

"I am sorry to dash your hopes," was the answer; "but it now becomes my duty to tell you that the document has been destroyed, in presence of Mrs. Gardiner. If you go up and see him he will probably tell you of the circumstance."

The unfortunate Nagle was almost struck down by this news, and remained staring stupidly at his informant.

At last he recovered himself.

"I had better see him," he said, quietly. "There *can't* be such villany in the world. I'll make no noise, I give you my word of honour."

"To be sure," cried the doctor, "nothing more reasonable. By all means, go up. But recollect what I said: his mind is in that state of balance that the slightest

excitement will overset it. Now you may go up."

Awe-stricken and crushed, Mr. Nagle went up and tapped softly at the door. A wild face was put forth.

"You there! Go away at once—leave me!" cried Mr. Doughty. "Why not bring your cruel, heartless daughter with you? She has pierced me to the heart—she has killed me. What do you want with me?"

"Only to see you," said Mr. Nagle, collecting himself for a desperate effort. "And I may only have this opportunity, for there is such a gang about the house that soon no one will have access to you at all."

"What, you mean my relatives? Oh, they are taking care of me. But, as I said, you want something—money? Not one halfpenny. I intend to give it all to charity,

to build an hospital for the Incurables. I intend to 'die and endow a college for a cat.' You have heard of *that* before now."

Mr. Nagle started at this expression, which was not a familiar quotation to him, and which he assumed to be the coinage of his friend's brain.

"My God! A cat," he repeated, "endow a cat! what a singular idea!"

"Yes," repeated the other, vehemently, "a whole community of cats, sooner than a shilling should come to those who have broken my heart. As for the will," went on Mr. Doughty, "there are the fragments. You are welcome to them. Your daughter has lost a fortune, but she has shown an example of splendid Spartan self-denial. All at my expense, though. God forgive her for it. She has dealt with me cruelly—most cruelly——"

"No, no," said the other, deprecatingly. "She will come back, I know she will. I'll make her."

"Make her? No! Let her do what she pleases—I do not care to hear of her now. Never breathe her name to me. I suppose you fancy that I shall in time become again the soft, foolish dupe I once was, and lavish everything on her and the lover for whom she has sacrificed me."

"Who do you mean?" asked Mr. Nagle, quite bewildered. "I vow and protest I don't understand——"

"No, of course, you know nothing. Not that she has gone after her idol—that his departure for India was all a delusion. They are up in London together. She loved him from the beginning—loved him all this time—loves him now. It was an artfully contrived scheme." He went on:

"Oh, you are beginning to see it, now.

It is all intelligible. She thought, I suppose, that she would be forced into a hated marriage with her elderly and infatuated admirer. She need not have been afraid. From this hour I have done with her. And I have done with you all. Let me never see your face again. It was an unlucky day that I first laid eyes on you."

Mr. Nagle's voice, spirit, power of action, were so taken away by these words, that he suffered himself to be driven out from the citadel on which his eyes had so long and so fondly reposed. He felt that at last all was over, and, with some mortification, that through this episode he had merely figured as the obscure pawn of the game.

He retired in much consternation, completely overwhelmed by the overthrow of all his hopes, and by the singular change that had come over his late friend and patron.

"God bless us all! He never talked and rambled in that style before," he said to himself. "And talking of leaving the property to cats! Heaven help us! She can't have upset his wits?"

Doctor Spooner appeared to show him out.

"I hope everything went on satisfactorily? You attended to my warning, I hope, and did not excite him?"

"Don't talk to me about it. Excite him! He was excited enough before I came in. Why he's mad—staring mad."

"What did he say?"

"Why, threatened us all round; and my girl Corinna, too. He has warned me not to come near him. Talks of leaving all his money to the cats. The man's a raving lunatic."

"This is all very strange," said the doctor. "Are you quite sure of what you

heard? I must own that his manner to the two ladies who have just left, suggested the same idea. They made almost the same remark. Founding an institution for cats, you are sure, were the words?"

"I'll take my affidavit to it," said Mr. Nagle, with importance.

"Oh! if so, then you will not be likely to let the recollection slip out of your mind. It really shows great sagacity in you to have noticed what might have properly occurred only to a physician. Good-bye."

Rather soothed at this compliment, Mr. Nagle went his way. The sense of being the depository of such valuable information, and the longing to find people to whom he could impart his griefs, his sense of cruel desertion, and a wish to prove that he was still in communication with his late patron,

made him go about varnishing up the important fact he had communicated to Mr. Spooner.

Before evening every one was talking of the piteous condition of poor old Doughty, shaking their heads half dismally, half enjoyingly, over the sudden upset of his wits. The unfortunate speech reported by Mr. Nagle was repeated with infinite zest. An infirmary for cats was a notion the most nicely fitted in the world to produce the impression desired; hours of description could not have done nearly so much. And Mr. Nagle was led on by his vanity to repeat it to innumerable persons.

The question was then asked, "Who were his next of kin?" Whose duty was it to move in the matter? Somebody should surely take the matter up, and look after the poor creature whose

wits had been overset by sickness, and the cruel shock he had received. Here was an exciting topic enough for Brickford.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPENSE.

IT may have been noticed that a singular change had come over the band of persons who were now engaged in hunting down Mr. Doughty and his treasure. These, when seen at the little musical party with which this story began, were a group of ladies and gentlemen of the average kind, harmless and indifferent, and in some degree good-natured. By a gradual descent we now find these respectable people hungering with eager, jealous eyes, after gold, all engaged in this

excited and unscrupulous pursuit, and ready almost to go to any lengths in the ardour of their unholy greed. Their strained and restless eyes watched each other with a jealous fury. They were restless, perpetually going out into the streets with no defined view, or hovering near the premises where this expected treasure was, occasionally encountering each other very awkwardly, and making off with a guilty air, as though they had only accidentally been passing by that way.

Thus it was that Will Gardiner could hardly have been recognised by any friend who had lately known him as a hearty, boisterous, welcome-giving fellow, that seized on people violently, and carried them home to dinner to be deafened by his boisterous laughter. The affectionate father, who wearied people with praises of his girl, the tolerant husband, the good-natured friend

—had faded out. In his place there was now a silent and restless being, inclined to be captious and even quarrelsome, and in whose eyes was to be read this unholy eagerness and expectancy. It was unfortunate, too, that at this time should have come pressure from debts, in which his lavish hospitality had involved him. It was noticed that Parkinson, the manager of the West of England Branch Bank at Brickford, was a frequent guest at the Will Gardiner dinners, and that often Will Gardiner broke out into the loudest and most boisterous praise of this gentleman's pleasant manners and good heart. He was one of the best fellows breathing, a real honest, downright, straightforward, English man of business. It was not unreasonably assumed—as this was a very average sort of being—that these enthusiastic spasms followed close on some indulgent "renewal"

which had been transacted that day at the bank. Yet now it was remarked that Will Gardiner, going about moody and dark-browed, had relaxed in his praises, and on one or two occasions had burst out into angry condemnation of his admired friend and of his system. He was ruining the bank. It was a wonder that the other banks had not enterprise enough to start a new branch. There was plenty of room. The griping, stingy, and scraping system was old-fashioned, and if some new concern were started on a really liberal system they would take the wind out of the sails of the present establishment. In short, it had long been suspected that Will Gardiner had been going too fast, and in a place like Brickford suspicion was knowledge, and knowledge became next to certainty. His lady, too, the agreeable, managing Mrs. Gardiner, showed symptoms of the same

ugly influence. Her face had grown pinched, her voice more tart, and she dealt forth her customary ill-natured speeches with more than usual sharpness of barb. Between her and her good-natured, complacent husband, unusual scenes of altercation and reproach took place. But there was an agreement in one essential point, that "something must be done," and that very quickly, or the card house in which they were living would come toppling down about their ears.

Of Lady Duke's position we have already spoken. She herself was pressed and harassed a good deal by the same forces. But with people of fashion, and "of a certain position," and who have some sort of an estate, the billows of pecuniary distress are slow in rising, and may beat for years against the stone breakwater without serious damage. It is very different with the

professional man in the rising town, who is living "in a good style," which too often signifies "beyond his means." There a catastrophe often comes with appalling rapidity. Lady Duke had therefore some breathing time before her. But on the other hand she felt that unless she acted promptly and speedily, her competitors would be beforehand with her.

Finally, there was Doctor Spooner. He was a mere adventurer without a shilling, but hoping to "get on." All, therefore, who were engaged in this rather exciting contest were pretty much upon a level as regards the pressure that was urging them on to speedy action. Lady Duke felt, that she must lead if they were to win at all. The Gardiners had the same impression, and were constrained to admit that, without her they would have little chance; but Will was too proud to enter into a direct

alliance with her. Indeed, Mrs. Gardiner was so defiant and so confident in her own talents that she felt quite disinclined to share the spoils of victory. She had bitter suspicions of Lady Duke, and believed that her "game" was to secure everything for herself, taking possession of the unhappy Doughty, and stripping him of everything, whether he were dead or alive, sane or mad. Were they not as nearly related to the patient as were the Dukes, and did not Mr. Gardiner's position as a barrister and judge, seem to mark him out as the suitable person to have charge of the matter?

The husband and wife had many conferences on this head, he hanging back with a not unnatural scrupulousness, the lady urging him forward with arguments and taunts, somewhat after the model of those used by Lady Macbeth on a more formidable occasion. What was he afraid

of? was it not their duty after all to act? Ought he not to be afraid of the terrible pressure—the invasion of creditors whose proceedings he was now staving off with such difficulty, and who would presently, no doubt, resort to extreme measures? This appeal never failed with Will Gardiner, and his next impulse was always to ask what they were to do.

Mrs. Gardiner had it all mapped out clearly, and gave her programme in the sharpest and most distinct manner. They must be bold, fearless, and act entirely for themselves. There must be no throwing in their lot with any one else, and no compromising or weak delicacy. The only way was to strike boldly—take up a line of open hostility, force themselves in, and let the citadel fall to the strongest. They were the strongest. He was a man—a barrister—a person of position—opposed

to whom were feeble women, and creatures like Nagle and Spooner. There he was, she said again, of course, a chief difficulty—the patient himself; but with him, the same course must be pursued, a summary assault and capture, with a firm holding of the ground.

These suggestions were artfully pressed, not all at once, but on various occasions, and at many a nightly council. Still he resisted.

"I don't like this work," he said. "It's shabby, too, throwing her over after she joined with us. It's dirty work, and I am ashamed of myself at the very idea."

"Of what?" would say his wife, impatiently. "We are doing no more than what is always done in these cases. It is most painful and disagreeable, but that can't be helped. We must strike boldly and bear down all opposition with a high

hand; or else be borne down ourselves. It should come to us of right. I have no patience with the selfish, greedy fellow whining over his loves, and neglecting his real relations who have a claim on him!"

This rough-and-ready way of putting the matter made due impression on Will Gardiner, who felt there was a certain cruel logic at the bottom of it—a logic to the effect that something must be done, and done very speedily. Even as he looked at the handsome furniture, the most substantial and tasteful in Brickford, another argument was addressed to him; for the ugly claws of an odious and spectral octopus seemed to be sprawling over it, holding the cabinets, mirrors, couches, &c., in a fast clutch. This octopus was a BILL OF SALE which some time before he had been obliged to give to that very Mr. Parkinson, the manager of the bank, in return for cer-

tain necessary advances, and in reference to which he had been receiving many necessary reminders.

" After all," he said to himself, " if we do not do something he will fall into the fangs of that happy woman, Duke, who would not mind killing the poor fellow, so that she got hold of the spoil."

This charitable view determined him, and he finally made up his mind to act.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BIRKENSHAWS.

LADY DUKE had also made up her mind to act, and did not lose a moment in carrying out her plans. She had written to her husband to come back at once, believing that his presence with the "K.C.B." adornments, his military, almost magisterial presence, would lend a sort of weight and glitter to the proceedings. He had already arrived, though his presence was not known to the town of Brickford. She was careful not to tell him more of her proposed business than

that it was a most painful matter, and that they were compelled to interfere in the interests of the poor victim himself, who would otherwise become the prey of a gang of designing persons. For Sir George Duke, notoriously subservient as he was to his lady's behests, was a gentleman of strict honour, who would not engage himself in "dirty" business of any kind for all the wealth of the world. It was presented to him, therefore, as a sort of Samaritan office most necessary, which would of course be for the interest of the family, though this was merely an incident.

Mr. Birkenshaw, as we have seen, was a solicitor, and a new solicitor, who, like so many other professional gentlemen, had come to settle in the rising town of Brickford. He was a hard-faced young man, and was known to be poor and struggling. It was, however, admitted that he came of

a tolerably good family, but had "disgraced himself" in the eyes of the community by running off with a shopkeeper's daughter, whom he believed to have plenty of money in her own right; but who proved to be sadly "in the power of her father," as the phrase runs, a power which that parent declined, or was unable, to exert in her favour. This disastrous mistake was fatal to his prospects at Brickford, for the community could not pass over the double failure. Had he secured a fortune, his success would have gone a good way towards condoning the low character of the alliance. The girl, who expected to "be made a lady of," was deeply mortified at this public neglect, which no less affected her husband. He was indeed disgusted with the place, and was thinking of setting out for Australia, or some other colony where there would be an opening for his

talents, and where there were no such impediments to a man's success, when he was sent for to draw Mr. Doughty's will. This seemed like the breaking of the clouds.

Very astute and far-seeing, he at once took in the whole situation at a glance; he saw the opposing interests, the contention of the various parties, and the bitter struggle that was going on round the sick man's bed. Here was a case which he had often longed for, as giving a scope to his talents which no humdrum professional business would offer in a twelvemonth. Doctor Spooner had led him to believe that it was by his interest that he had been introduced, but he very soon discovered that he owed his introduction to Mr. Doughty himself. Mr. Doughty was likely to be interested by the hardship of the case, and the disqualification which the

intolerant society of Brickford so unfairly laid upon a struggling man. The solicitor, therefore, rather resented the pretence of patronage which had been put forward, and felt himself discharged from all obligation of supporting his introducer.

The shopkeeper's daughter was pining in a sort of discontent, bitterly disappointed at her exclusion from the high society of Brickford, which she had made sure of entering. She heard of the many entertainments that went forward, and looked wistfully from afar off, quite in despair at her exclusion. Her husband, too, who felt that he had been dragged down from his former position, was aggrieved by this neglect, and eager to be revenged on the Brickfordians for their slights. She gave him many weary hours owing to complaints and repinings at this treatment, and was never weary making attempts of a secret and

roundabout character to acquire "her proper position in society." But the ladies of Brickford were sternly resolute, and indeed took a pride in keeping such a person in her proper place.

One day Mr. Birkenshaw was in his office waiting for clients, who, if they did present themselves, were usually of a needy class. He was for the hundredth time execrating the miserable opportunities the place offered to a man of his genius, when he saw, through the blind, a carriage drive up to the door. Here, at last, was an opportunity; from the window above, his wife had also seen the arrival, and hailed it with a pleased flutter. She knew that it was Lady Duke's carriage, and saw that personage descend in all her state. She could not hope that this visit had anything to do with recognition of herself; but still it might be the beginning of a re-

lation of some kind, and she watched nervously.

Mr. Birkenshaw received his visitor with all respect. She had come, she said, on a matter of business, to ask Mr. Birkenshaw's professional aid. Her son had run up bills at Brickford, and the tradesmen had made extortionate charges. There were besides a dealing or two with some money-lenders, which might have been in regular course; but she felt herself—a poor woman—wholly unfitted to deal with them. Would Mr. Birkenshaw take the matter up, see these people, and make some sort of arrangement?

Such was really the state of the young gentleman's affairs, but hitherto she had not been specially anxious to accommodate his creditors, who, she considered, should wait like other people. It was Alfred's own affair, she would say, and if he chose

to run in debt he must deal with these people himself, and settle with them as best he could.

Mr. Birkenshaw was delighted to undertake the task. After business details had been despatched, Lady Duke was heard to give utterance to these memorable and comforting words:

"I fear I have been very remiss in calling on Mrs. Birkenshaw; but that is a pleasure I have long looked forward to. Perhaps," this with a gracious courtesy, "I might be so fortunate as to find her at home now?"

The solicitor's face flushed with pleasure. He leaped up and begged she would excuse him for a moment; then flew up-stairs with the welcome news to his wife, giving her warning to prepare a hasty toilet in honour of the event. Right joyfully and speedily did she set about the task, and in a

few moments he was ushering up the great lady into their modest drawing-room.

Lady Duke, as we have seen, was a woman of the world, and knew how to avoid being patronising where she meant to be gracious. She was most agreeable, hinted at her own private influence in Brickford, and said there were numbers of her friends who would be delighted to know Mrs. Birkenshaw. Then she turned the conversation on the prevailing topic of the moment. Here she showed some adroitness; for she had taken care not to make a single allusion to the matter down in the office. Business in the drawing-room loses the official air of business.

"It is a most unhappy state of things," she said, "and his state is growing really pitiable. It is the one topic of conversation here. Fancy a poor helpless creature left

as prey to adventurers, who only want to despoil him of all he has."

"Oh, it is dreadful! shocking!" said the lady, who from henceforth was to agree with every sentiment of her august visitor.

"Yes," said her husband. "From all accounts, they seem to have succeeded. For it is no secret in this place how he has disposed of his vast wealth. I prepared his will, which I supposed to be a secret, yet I have been told by every one I met the exact disposition. It is no use keeping up any professional reserve in the matter."

"But have you not heard what has happened since? The will no longer exists."

Mr. Birkenshaw coloured a little, as though this had been some slight to his handiwork.

"No longer exists! What has he done?"

"It is said," said Lady Duke, stooping forward, and speaking in a low, earnest voice, "that in some paroxysm of fury, or paroxysm of *madness*—this, at least, is the story—he seized the paper, and tore it into fragments. Latterly, certainly, he has been growing very strange."

"This is curious news. I was expecting every day to hear from him, and have the deed executed regularly," said the solicitor, with some vexation, for he had intended working the case up into a substantial and satisfactory "job." "He was certainly sensible and rational enough when giving me his instructions; but this sudden proceeding certainly is strange. Then he has thrown over the Nagles?"

"Completely. But there is a more extraordinary story still, which I think I ought to tell you; but I shall reserve that until we go downstairs into your study. For this

is meant as a visit to Mrs. Birkenshaw," added the lady, bowing sweetly, "and we must not be talking business in her drawing-room."

Immensely gratified at this compliment, the solicitor's wife could only smile and bow, and was so delighted that she did not perceive that her august visitor confined herself to the compliment, and promptly rose to descend to the office for the business she had alluded to.

Lady Duke was in a moment on the most confidential terms with the lawyer.

"Should not something be done in the matter?" she said. "It is getting very serious. There can be no doubt—if what I have heard be true—that he *has* taken up these strange delusions. It may be a sort of misapprehension, but it is stated on excellent and undoubted authority, that he has declared that he will make an en-

tirely new will, and found some sort of a hospital for cats and dogs. The idea is so absurd, that it must be an exaggeration. But he should be seen by proper medical authority at once, who should pronounce on his state."

Mr. Birkenshaw was growing interested, and made the very remark that she was inviting.

"His nearest relations should look after him. He should not be left a prey to people like those Spooners and Nagles. You know, of course, who are the most nearly connected with him."

"Oh, we are, beyond question," said she; "but you see there is great delicacy in taking any step. I have tried, I frankly confess, to give him advice—to make my way in to see him; but really there have been such scenes, such indecent scenes—what with putting obstacles in the way,

and almost barricading the door, that really no lady could expose herself to——"

All at once the lawyer saw the whole situation. Up to that moment he had been, as it were, dazzled by the surprise of the visit, and the anticipated pleasure to be found in the new acquaintance. Lady Duke had, besides, led up to the matter in such a natural way, that he had not perceived the nature of the business that had really brought her to him. Now it was all revealed, and Lady Duke saw by his face, and with some awkwardness, that he understood her.

"You wish me to act for you, to advise you, to assist you?" he said, bluntly and coldly, for he had been puzzled to discover the motive of Lady Duke's attention to his wife. "Do you want to assert your place beside the patient, and take the whole control of the matter?"

"Oh, no!" said Lady Duke, confused. "I spoke merely out of humanity. I should not like to see a poor helpless being like him made a victim of——"

"Except by those who are properly entitled to do so. I mean," he added hastily, "you wish him to be protected by those who have the right to protect him. You think that *you* have the right; the Gardiners that they have as great a right. The Nagles have strong ideas on the same subject. In short, it is a task that requires boldness and tact, and the satisfaction of saving this poor man from being the prey of harpies is likely to be won only by those who show skill and tact. Suppose," continued Mr. Birkenshaw rising, "we adjourn into my confidential room, and consider this matter more in detail."

After a short pause, Lady Duke followed him into the confidential room, where they

remained closeted more than half an hour. What was arranged there was not known even to the wife of Mr. Birkenshaw's bosom, but it was something more important than conventions for future visitings and agreeable intimacy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOCTOR DISMISSED.

A CURIOUS change was coming over Mr. Doughty. Slightly better in health, he had grown eager, excitable, and highly irritable—a state of mind that did not promise to forward his recovery. He was eager "to do something," to be gone, to rush out on the world, and, above all, leave Brickford, with its miserable and torturing associations, behind him. He was heard pacing his room all day, and for a great part of the night, tramping to and fro, talking loudly, and chafing under his miseries. Those

who entered found him busy in the midst of a perfect wreck of papers, which he had unpacked from the boxes that had come down, and by arranging which he was trying to distract his thoughts. Then he would start up and recommence his pacing. He longed to be well, to be free, and, above all, to be alone.

On the day when he had heard of Corinna's abrupt departure, the extraordinary pertinacity of his friends and relations in forcing their way in to see him, had, for the first time, struck him as singular. A sort of nervous apprehension of what was, indeed, the truth, came upon him, and made him still more eager to be gone from the place. His first thought was that he should be left alone, and entirely free from the presence of people whom he had began to detest, as being associated with all that had brought him misery.

This idea having taken possession of him, he did not lose a moment, but sent for Doctor Spooner. After thanking him for all the trouble he had taken in his case, he told him that he now felt strong enough to dispense with the presence of a medical gentleman in his house. He would take care to show, by a substantial reward, his sense of the services rendered to him.

The doctor was not a little confounded at this news, and shook his head slowly.

"This is a delusion, Mr. Doughty," he said; "you are anything but well. At this moment you should not be but in your bed. See, as it is you can hardly stand."

"No matter," said the patient; "I can have your assistance when I desire it. You can come and see me. And your sister's services, too—I cannot trespass on her kindness longer."

"Oh, there is no trespassing in the case.

You must really allow us to stay some time longer. It is no object to me or to her. We look only to your interest. You must consider, my dear sir, that I have a certain responsibility in this matter, and can judge better than you can. You are *not* in a fit state to be left alone. It would be most improper in me to sanction such a step."

"I quite appreciate your motives," said the other, wearily; "but on this point I have made up my mind. I feel better each day, and shall be better, I know, to-morrow than I am to-day. All thanks to you. In a few days I shall be strong enough to quit this place, which is the sole thought and hope of my mind. This occupation," he said, pointing to the papers about him, "distracts me. But I have them nearly all arranged. That does not look like a sick man's work. I worked till one o'clock last

night. It keeps away wretched thoughts. In the very act of tearing up and destroying papers, do you know, I find a curious distraction."

Doctor Spooner glanced at the door, which was slightly ajar, and whence was heard, during this conversation, a slight rustle.

"Most natural," he said, "you feel a relief in the action. It gives an occupation for your over-excited nerves."

"Why, I believe," said Mr. Doughty, smiling, "I must have torn up whole reams. It seems like tearing hopes, joys, sorrows—the whole past and all the future."

Again the doctor looked towards the door with a curious expression. The other, glancing at him quickly, saw it.

"At all events," he said, "my mind is made up. I *must* be alone in my own

house. So I will ask you and Miss Spooner to leave me by this evening. You understand."

"Not this evening. Say to-morrow morning, or a day or two hence."

The other looked at him angrily.

"I have told you my wishes, Doctor Spooner, and I require them to be carried out. Please to leave me at once."

The other bowed, and was retiring, when Mr. Doughty called him back.

"Forgive me," he said, putting out his hand, "for speaking so bluntly. But I do not want to see people, or have them about me—for a time, at least. The human face divine, as they call it, has nothing divine for me. It sometimes goads me to madness. You must have indulgence. I have suffered a great deal, but after a little solitude shall soon become a rational being again. To-morrow let me expect a

regular professional visit from you. But go."

The doctor retired at once, left the house, and repaired to Lady Duke.

"We must act," he said, "without delay. He has taken a suspicious fit, and ordered us to leave the house. His malady, I fear, is gaining upon him."

"Why, what is the last symptom?" she asked, eagerly.

"Oh, many," he said, "and one the strongest and most significant: the sitting for hours tearing up papers into little fragments. He calls it tearing up his enemies! My sister was passing the door and heard him. He wants to be left alone altogether. But he is not fit to be left alone a moment."

"Then what is to be done?" said Lady Duke. "We must lose no time. I have seen Birkenshaw. He is with us, and en-

gages to see that everything is done legally and properly."

"We must let him be seen by another doctor. The opinion of two physicians will be necessary. I will get Craggs—a man," added Doctor Spooner, slowly, "who has had a very great deal of experience in these more delicate cases, and who is independent of all parties here."

"Then what must be the first step?" asked Lady Duke.

"It would be only proper to be installed in the house, and take possession. He must be put under proper care, if it were only to interpose between him and others. I believe those Gardiners, at this very moment, have some design on hand, and hope to slip in, and establish themselves. The wife is a very scheming person. I met him in the street this morning, and I thought that he looked as if he wished to

avoid me. Depend upon it they are at some crafty game. He is a poor creature, but she is very artful."

"It is unpleasant that one should have to struggle with such people in a matter of duty, but matters have come to this pass, that we cannot be delicate. This is my place, and I shall not shrink from taking it."

"Quite proper," said the doctor. "For this evening I can easily put him off, though, and stay in the house."

"But why not leave him altogether, as he desires?" said Lady Duke.

The doctor gave her a look of suspicion. Lady Duke had spoken without any after thought.

"Well, it might be done," said he, "but it would be a little too dangerous. I think the real course for me would be to tell him his state boldly, and then what his nearest relations propose doing."

"And those Nagles?"

"Oh, they are out of the"—"running," he was going to say, but he felt it was an inappropriate word, so he substituted "business." "What right or title have they to interfere? They should not be tolerated for a moment. But, as I say, they are disposed of, and will give no more trouble. No; to-morrow will be time enough. I must then act formally in your name. After a few days he can be removed to a proper place, where he will be taken the best care of. I can see that all this will be most painful and disagreeable for you, but it really must be done."

This artful adviser put matters so that the lady really persuaded herself that she was acting in the business from honourable and high-souled motives, and putting herself forward to do what was disagreeable

in the interests of the unhappy being himself.

Thus did the pair meet and separate, having arranged for some fresh stages in their plot.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROMPTER.

WILL GARDINER, after the plan which he had arranged with his wife, or rather which she had arranged for him, went his way, in a troubled state of mind. He was not quite satisfied with himself.

"I have kept my hands clean all my life, and done what is reputable," he said to himself; "have got a tolerably good name to hand down to my children, and now I must enter into this plot against a poor sick devil who has been kind to me. I don't

like it." But then, he thought, if "the poor devil" was so mad—mad as any hatter—he was doing no more than some necessary legal ceremony, which was always more or less disagreeable and painful, but, all the same, must be done by some one. It would, to a certainty, be done by those harpies, "Duke and Co.," and he was, in reality, doing a rough sort of kindness in saving the poor fellow from them. And then, most potent argument of all, there was the bill of sale, the daily pressure of applications for money, which he knew not how to answer or to put off, to say nothing of domestic pressure at home.

"Besides," said Will, as he walked along, bound for Mr. Doughty's, "the man *is* mad. Surely any one that could think of founding hospitals for cats is not fit to be intrusted with the disposal of large sums

of money. He must be protected from himself."

As he was hurrying along on his way to the house, and had just come to the corner of the street in which the victim lived, he came upon two figures, whose heads were laid close together, and who were talking earnestly. They started in a guilty fashion as he came up. It was the music-master and the clerical brother.

"What are you two hatching there?" said Will, suddenly growing hostile. "Contriving how you will get at the goose with the golden eggs?"

"Oh, that will not do," said his brother. "That comes very well from you. Others are entitled to have their chance. The thing isn't to be made a monopoly of."

"No, nor shan't be," said Mr. Nagle. "Mean arts have been used to cause divisions between me and my friend. His

mind has been worked on. He has been set against me and my daughter. The whole town knows the footing we were on. It was patent to every one."

"My good Nagle," said Will, with a forced laugh, "I am sorry for your failure; you did your best, and deserved to win; but what can you do? And my holy brother there—have his sacred ministrations been declined with thanks?"

"This is a poor style of joking," answered the clergyman, hotly; "but it won't do. I know the work that is going on, and the whole town knows it too."

"What d'ye mean, brother?" said Will, angrily; "you're talking childishly."

"Nothing of the kind, sir! I mean the trying to make out that certain people are not sound in their intellects, and don't know what they are doing. We know the object of that."

"A nefarious scheme," said Mr. Nagle, warmly; "it's an unholy combination. The poor fellow has one of the clearest and most collected heads that ever came into the world."

"But tell me this," said Will, angrily; "who has been going about nodding and shrugging shoulders, and telling every one that his wits were gone? My good do-re-mi-fa-sol friend, too many people heard you, for you to go back of that."

"Oh, things are so exaggerated," said Mr. Nagle; "misconstruction can easily be put on harmless language."

"And as a clergyman, I really have a right to interfere. I am not going to stand by and see an unfortunate man made a prey of in this way. It's too cruel altogether."

"And so unfair," said Will, sneering. "Unfair to you and your large family, who

are not to have a finger in the pie! My dear, good, pious brother, take my advice, leave the thing alone; you and your friend Nagle here will make a very indifferent pair of contrivers. You will be pushed against the wall, your little game of tactics is very poor and transparent. I see through it perfectly. The whole place sees it; but it won't do."

"You forget yourself," said the clergyman, now very angry. "Let me tell you, you are considered in Brickford not to be so very clever after all. You haven't managed your own affairs so cleverly. Don't shout before you are out of the wood!"

Will Gardiner gave him a furious look, and passed on. Again, alas! for Pylades and Orestes! The two affectionate brothers, when they next met in the street, passed each other without recognition.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CONVERSION.

MR. DOUGHTY, when his medical adviser left him, fell into a strange state of excitement. It was now revealed to him in what peril he was standing.

"Good heavens," he thought, "if they should take any such step! I have read of such dreadful things! I am a poor helpless creature, here, quite at their mercy. God help me!"

He then thought of all their repeated visits, their curious looks, and competing

struggles to secure admission. He felt that he had literally no protection against any schemes they might have, and that he might be secured and carried off to some place of confinement where he might find no means of release. This idea threw him into an agony of terror, and for the time banished all thoughts of his malady, and even of the mental sufferings he was enduring.

He thought of flight, but the same sense of bitter helplessness pursued him. If they were furnished with proper powers he could be pursued and captured. It was his money that was the prize; and in that pursuit they would allow no scruples to stand in the way. His illness and anxieties had diverted his thoughts from considering the determined watch that had been kept over him, or their mercenary anxiety to gain admission, a compliment that would hardly

be paid to a poor and elderly bachelor of musical, and, perhaps, singular tastes. Putting everything together with his old sagacity, which was now returning to him unclouded, he felt by a sort of instinct that he had divined the true causes of all the late events that had attended his illness, and in his terror drops of perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

He felt that he must have all his powers ready to protect him. A sort of bitter dislike against these cruel conspirators took possession of him, while an eagerness to expose and defeat them filled his whole soul. He felt a new strength, and half the oppression of his illness left him. But, at the same time, he felt that he should have need of all his caution and self-restraint; for any emotion or show of resentment would be welcomed, and only be playing into their hands.

As these thoughts filled his mind, the door was opened, and one of the conspirators—for that character, indeed, was written on his face—stood before him. This was Will Gardiner, who, with a guilty air, had at last come to execute the task to which he had been prompted by his wife. He had watched from the window of a neighbour's house, to whom he paid an unreasonably long visit for the purpose—the neighbour's window commanding the Doughty house—until he had seen the doctor go out; and he literally blushed as he thought of this mean shift to which he found himself obliged to have recourse. He then pushed past what he called the "she-Cerberus" at the door, though not without a struggle, and made his way upstairs. A trusty body servant, whom he had resolved to "put in possession," bailiff-like, was to hang about near the door, ready to enter on a proper

signal; while in a street hard by flitted his excellent and inspiring helpmate, as it were shopping. To such an organised attempt had this amiable pair condescended.

Mr. Doughty started when he saw him.

"What do you want here?" he cried; "who allowed you to come in?"

"I just came in to see how you were getting on," said the other, confused, and in his mildest way.

"To see how I was getting on, on the road to incapacity and idiotcy. Do you all find that I am not going fast enough? Are you getting impatient?"

Much taken back at this speech, Will Gardiner could only falter out that he was delighted to see that he was better.

The other did not answer for some moments. Then said slowly:

"Don't imagine that I am ignorant of what is going on about me, or the schemes

of which I am the object. I am not surprised that some of the people here should have thought of finding their account in making me their victim in this cruel plot; but I thought that *you* had too manly and open a nature to descend to such baseness."

Will Gardiner was silent for a few moments, and coloured furiously.

"There is no plot, as you call it," he said; "but you *know* you have not been well, and that we have been anxious about you."

"And for that reason you would join the wretches that would seize on me, shut me up in a mad-house for the purpose of making me mad, and let me lie there for the rest of my life. I never injured you, that I am aware of, and always tried to be kind and good to you; and I can assure you if I had been so fortunate as to have

carried out the marriage I looked for, you, at least, would not have suffered."

Will Gardiner was much moved and disturbed by these words.

"I don't know what to say to you, Doughty, or what you will think of me. But as I sit here, in presence of Heaven, I thought, and I was told, that you were very bad indeed. There were speeches and things of yours reported about, which gave the idea, but," he added, warmly, "I believe that it may be all an invention. I don't want to have anything to do with it; I don't care what they may say" (the "they" stood for Mrs. Gardiner): "I wash my hands of it all. God forgive me for listening to them for a moment!"

"Then I am right," said Mr. Doughty, calmly. "There *is* some such plan on foot?"

Will Gardiner looked down.

"Well, I can only say this: I would

have you be on your guard. Some sort of thing will be attempted. I am ashamed of myself for having listened to it a moment. But the truth was, as others were about it, we thought we might as well prevent *them*. I know this explanation only makes matters worse for me, but still it is all the reparation I can offer you. Be on your guard, I tell you," he added, rising; "they will try something to-day or to-morrow. And think as badly as you like of me."

"No, no," said the other, smiling; "could you do nothing for me? But how am I, a poor helpless being, to protect myself? You will not hand me over to their mercy? Will you not aid me?"

Will Gardiner shook his head.

"No," he said, with some pride, "I had better not interfere at all. Motives will be imputed to me, but that is only the fitting penalty. I am ashamed of myself, indeed,

though not so bad as you think. God bless you, Doughty, and yet I would like to stand by you if I could; but you know," he added, "it was very hard to resist the pressure—every one at me; and I vow solemnly to you, if I had interfered, I would have stood between you and the rest. I am sure that I would, when it came to the last."

"Do so now, then," said the other, gently. "I want some friend, sadly. The odds are too much against me, you see now. I have been betrayed, deceived by those who were pretending to be my friends and comforters. It would be a satisfaction to baffle them."

"So it would," said Will, with his old hearty impulse; then suddenly checked himself, as he thought how all that he said, and could say, was applicable to his own intended proceedings. He hung down his

head with a guilty look, and again looked to the door.

"No," he said, "Doughty, I had better leave you to yourself, and to your own devices. I would give the world to help you. But I don't want you to think more meanly of me than you do. To the people here I will seem even yet more mean, if I ally myself with you."

"And why, pray?" said Mr. Doughty, with the same curious look; "because you will be supposed to have designs on me and my money? Speak candidly."

"Well, yes——"

"Then there is nothing to be apprehensive of on that score. Don't be afraid of *that.* By-and-by you will hear of something that will amaze this wretched Brickford. Then nothing can be said that will affect you. I have but one aim now, and that is to baffle this miserable gang, and

baffled they shall be—never fear; but I must have some one to stand by me, and help me."

Will Gardiner did not quite understand. But his brow cleared, and he seized on Mr. Doughty's hand and wrung it.

"Then what am I to do?" he asked. "Only tell me."

"Be with me as much as you can. Support me by pretending that you have the same scheme in view that they have. It will drive them to desperation."

Will Gardiner, always mercurial, entered with delight into this new idea, and forgot all his own private distresses in the anticipated enjoyment. He forgot, also, the very important share he had proposed to take in these obnoxious schemes. However, he was a thorough creature of impulse, and illogical enough not to see this inconsistency.

Almost at once his newly-found advocacy was put to the test. Here was Doctor Spooner returned, ushered in by his sister, who had clearly been telling him outside of the intrusion.

"Stand by me now," said Mr. Doughty, in a low voice, and with a trepidation owing to the enfeebling effect of his ill ness. "Now is the time to make a beginning."

The doctor thought he saw traces of the new alliance in their faces.

"You should not have come in here," he said to Will. "You interfere with my treatment. I think it bad taste, and my sister tells me you forced your way past her."

"I am here by the wish of your patient," said Will, "and I hope to stay here—to come and go as he pleases."

"Not without my sanction," said the

other; "so long at least as I am allowed to be in charge of his case."

"I told you not to return," said Mr. Doughty.

"That dismissal I cannot accept," said the doctor, not answering him directly, "until some one has been appointed to succeed me. Mr. Doughty is not in a fit state of health to be exposed to these intrusions. The responsibility is on me. He seems well now, and may be in a fair way of recovery, but these agitations and disturbances will have the worst effect. It is only a medical man that can understand this. And I now call upon you to withdraw."

"Well, this is cool," said Will Gardiner, yet a little awed by the doctor's confident manner.

"Cool or not, I must protect Mr. Doughty from himself. I look on him, and I say it

to his face, as being in a weak and helpless state of mind, such as would readily render him liable to be the prey of designing people. Those designs I and my sister here shall oppose strenuously, at least, until another physician shall be introduced."

"This is going too far," said Will Gardiner. "Do you dare apply such language to me? Or oppose him in his own house? Leave the place at once, sir. Shall I have him turned out, Doughty? Only say the word."

"Better not attempt anything of the kind," said Doctor Spooner, stepping back. "Mr. Doughty I am sure will give you the same advice, unless you have so excited him as to prevent his taking a calm view of the question. I take the whole affair upon myself."

"I think," said Mr. Doughty, with a

nervous manner that might have been assumed, "that Doctor Spooner seems to be right. All this worries and excites me. My poor brain will go. All that I have passed through during these few weeks would have fitted me for a mad-house. Don't irritate Doctor Spooner," added he, shading his eyes. "He will visit it on me if you go away."

"I am not going away," said Will Gardiner; "never fear. I shall return, and stay here for the night. Let anyone dare keep me out at their peril. You wish me to be with you?"

"Yes, yes. I have plans, and a great deal of business to arrange. I want to devote such little money as I have to a charitable purpose. Before I die I suppose I shall end by doing like other weak-minded beings, endow cats, and dogs, and colleges of all kinds."

The doctor's eyes twinkled at these welcome words.

"You hear," he said. "The whole place is full of these supposed intentions, which are singular enough. But we shall see all about that in good time. Meanwhile, Mr. Gardiner need not threaten. He can stay if he pleases, only he must take the consequences."

"Cheerfully," said Will.

The doctor retired. Will Gardiner seized his friend's hand, and, after a short conversation, left the house. The counter-plot had begun.

CHAPTER XXII.

WILL GARDINER ESTABLISHED IN THE FORTRESS.

WILL GARDINER came forth after the interview much excited, and in a glow of generous enthusiasm, such as attends on the performance of some noble action. He felt a little chilled as he met the expectant face of his wife, and suddenly remembered that he had come away without performing the task which he had undertaken. Still had he not succeeded to a certain extent?

"Well," she said, eagerly, "is it all settled? Have you managed it?"

"The poor, poor fellow," said Will, full of sympathy, "he is as helpless as a child. But I am terribly afraid of that Spooner and his gang. He has thrown off the mask."

"Afraid! Nonsense, are you a child? You are not such a baby——"

"No, I hope not. But the fellow has taken the airs of a bully, put his foot down, and all that. He said as good as that he would fight to hold his ground. Wouldn't go for any one!"

"And you—you will surely not let yourself be put down by a bully of his sort. Go back at once, and take possession."

"I am going back," said Will, mulishly. "And you need not talk in that way. Not that I think it will be worth our while taking much trouble about the poor fellow. He said something about the money being

all gone, or that he had none left; but, by Jove! he contradicted himself afterwards, for he talked of leaving it all to the cats. I don't follow it at all."

"I do, then, perfectly. It proves that the man's mind is rambling—that he can't fix it on one idea. You never could follow anything."

"No, he is *not* rambling," said Will. "But still he certainly told me different stories."

"Go back at once, or they will steal a march upon you. Get your things and take possession, and don't let them move you an inch from the spot, if you die for it. You know the state we are in, and that we can't afford to wait a day. Show that you have some sense or wit, and more brains than the miserable crew who are in this place. I know that old men with money take a malicious delight in trying to deceive

people about them. Show that you can deceive him."

Will Gardiner had never heard his wife speak to him with such energy. She overpowered him, and he felt from that moment that she had a strength of mind and a will that was superior to his own. However, he did not make any open protest; but retired silently, determined to carry out his own little plan. For it happily so fell out, that he could do so according to the letter of his instructions, though not after their spirit.

"I'll not raise a finger against the poor old fellow—if I can help it," he said to himself, putting in a useful qualification.

Late that night he came with a modest carpet-bag, and presented himself at the door. While he waited, he was preparing for a violent rush, and some vigorous bluster, in anticipation of serious resist-

ance; but, to his surprise, he found that the "Gorgon sister," as he was fond of styling her, welcomed his entrance, and allowed him to pass. She even led the way upstairs.

"This is the room I have got ready for you," she said, opening a door. "As you were determined to come, Mr. Doughty wished that you should be made comfortable."

Will Gardiner looked at her with suspicion.

"Why, what does this mean?" he said. "The wind looks as if it had changed."

"Not at all," she said, coldly. "My brother thinks it is not prudent, considering Mr. Doughty's state, to oppose any wish of his. He told you he did not intend to take any further share of responsibility —after to-morrow, at least—and that *you* must take the consequences."

Mr. Gardiner was not quite satisfied with these explanations, but established himself in his new room, and then repaired to Mr. Doughty's, where he was welcomed.

That gentleman seemed wonderfully restored. The sense of the peril in which he stood seemed to have driven away all feeling of ailment. Now his eyes burned with an angry glow of indignation against the wretches who were closing in round him. He had an eagerness to defeat their purpose. Long the two sat together, and when they wished each other good-night, Mr. Gardiner went his way with a wondering expression on his face.

"Was there ever such a turn?" he said to himself. "No matter, I'll stand by Old Doughty to the end and see the finish."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DUEL.

THE following morning was to usher in a day of momentous excitement for the various actors in the Brickford drama.

Early that day a new guest had arrived at Crockley's Family Hotel. This was known to be one Doctor Craggs, who came without luggage, save indeed a sort of professional hand-bag, which might contain papers, or surgical instruments, or shaving materials. He was a quick-eyed gentleman, with a sort of treasury clerk manner.

By-and-by, Doctor Spooner came to call on him, and was shown up to his room. Later arrived Lady Duke with her husband, and, later again, Mr. Birkenshaw, the solicitor.

Waiters, boots, and chambermaid wondered at the little gathering outside the family hotel. Two stout men, each chewing a straw, loitered, as if waiting for instructions. The party remained up-stairs for half an hour, and then all descended together. Lady Duke's carriage was waiting, but a fly was called, in which the two doctors seated themselves with Mr. Birkenshaw. Lady Duke and her husband entered their own carriage. The hour had come. The combined assault on the luckless Doughty was ready for execution.

It so happened that Mr. Nagle, very forlorn and draggled, was wandering past the family hotel door, and was attracted by

the sort of little cavalcade now about setting forth. He noted the strange figure that was seated by "that Spooner," and the singular and almost ominous attendance of Lady Duke and husband in the other carriage. He hurried up to the first conveyance just as it was starting, and caught hold of its door-handle.

"I say, where are you going—what d'ye mean? What's to do?"

"Nothing in the world," said Doctor Spooner, quietly. "Pray don't detain us."

"But where are ye going?" said Mr. Nagle, gesticulating with one hand, but retaining the door-handle with the other. "I insist on knowing. There's some scheming, I know, to be carried out at that poor fellow's house."

"Hush! hush!" said the doctor, looking round in alarm, for a crowd was gather-

ing. "Don't make a noise here, sir—go away."

"I shall *not* go away. I see the whole conspiracy now. I shall get the police in; the law shall interfere. I am not going to have myself and my daughter swindled out of their just rights in this way."

"Look here," said the doctor, stooping down to speak in a low voice, "pray don't make a disturbance. If you wish you can come with us. I assure you everything is to be done properly and legally. If you desire to satisfy your suspicions, you are welcome to attend. I can say no more. There!"

Mr. Nagle looked at him suspiciously. Then, with a fresh protest, opened the carriage door irresolutely, and took his place in the carriage.

The party then drove away to Mr. Doughty's.

They went up-stairs, and found the owner sitting at his desk, busy with his papers. His friend Will Gardiner was in the room with him. A few moments later arrived the general, who entered not a little fluttered. There was a look of good-humoured toleration on Mr. Doughty's face, and he did not seem in the least disturbed by this odd visit and the gathering of people.

"What a large party," he said, as they entered. "To what do I owe this? Are you all so anxious about my health? I am much better, I assure you—all but restored to health."

"You think that you are," said Doctor Spooner, who now spoke in the most soothing fashion. "But it is my duty to tell you that your friends are not satisfied as to your state. With this view, they have desired that you should be seen by a physician of more eminence than the humble

individual who has been so long attending you."

"But I am quite in my senses," said the patient, "if that be what you mean—though I do not owe that to the friends who have been kindly looking after me. I see no spectres at night, though I own I have been subject to some delusions."

"That is a good sign," said Doctor Craggs. "So far so good."

"So far so good," said Mr. Doughty. "Perhaps those about me have been under greater delusions. They may have thought me interesting, captivating, wise, good, and beautiful; all because I had money. Now, curious as it may seem, all this time I HAVE HAD NO MONEY!"

The whole party started, then exchanged looks.

"To be sure, to be sure," said the doc-

tor, in a petting way. "Quite so. So you have no money?"

"Not a shilling that I can call my own. I have been like those travelling swindlers that visit towns like this, and obtain goods and attentions, and consideration under false pretences: who sometimes, indeed, go so far as to win the affections of a beautiful girl under the same false pretences. The parallel exactly holds. You are welcome to arrest me, and carry me off to prison, for my offences, for I own to being guilty, though not with malice aforethought."

Again all the party looked at each other. Doctor Spooner glanced at his colleague with considerable satisfaction.

"And now," said Dr. Craggs, "tell me this. When you had this money, or were supposed to have it, you intended making some charitable use of it, didn't you? An hospital, or something of the kind, eh?"

"Oh," said Mr. Doughty, smiling, "they told you that! Die or endow a college or a cat. Well, I might do worse with my cash. But alas! As I told you, I have none."

"I think," said he, "we need not remain. Doctor Craggs would wish to see you in private for a few moments; then, my dear sir, we shall give you no more trouble."

Will had remained silent during the interview.

"I shall wait," he said, "as Mr. Doughty's friend, for no one else here can be considered as answering to that description."

Doctor Spooner answered him in a peremptory way:

"You must not interpose, Mr. Gardiner. It will not be tolerated, I can assure you."

"Go, Gardiner," said the patient, or victim; "leave me with these gentlemen. They will not do me any harm, I am sure they won't. I have no money, recollect. Vacuus cantabit, recollect."

Will Gardiner retired. Outside he found Lady Duke waiting, with eager face.

They all went down to the drawing-room, except the two doctors. Will could not contain himself. He went to the window, saw the carriage waiting, and the suspicious-looking men hanging about.

"You have laid your plans well," he said. "It has been an infamous scheme from beginning to end. But don't think you will succeed, Lady Duke. If I were to work every court in the kingdom, I'll circumvent you."

"I have no doubt that you will try," she said, calmly. "But I think after to-day there can be no doubt of this poor man's

state. You heard him yourself deny that he had any money."

"Yes I did. Some of his sarcastic jesting. I've heard plenty of rich people deny they had money."

"I'll raise the whole town," said Mr. Nagle, whose protest had a certain feebleness after the more hearty one of Will Gardiner. "It's a conspiracy!"

Now, the two doctors came down very hurriedly.

"We must lose no time," said Doctor Spooner. "You are quite satisfied on this examination, Dr. Craggs, that Mr. Doughty is of unsound mind?"

"I think he is under delusions at present, and that he has received a sudden shock. He had clearly set his affections on a particular object, and by dwelling too much on that subject, has become a little unsettled. Restraint in a proper place and supervision

are absolutely necessary, and I am prepared to sign a certificate."

"I can't see this done," said Will Gardiner, vehemently. "I oppose it, and shall oppose it to the death. He shan't be taken from his own house in this way."

"You will oppose us in this step, which his relations have sanctioned?" the doctor said, looking at him fixedly.

"Tooth and nail, hand and foot," said Will, defiantly. "I promised to stand by him, and I shall. He is sick and weak, and doesn't know what you would do to him."

"Good, *very* good," said the other. "I merely wanted to know your intentions. You can begin your opposition when you please; but you will be sorry for it."

Mr. Gardiner strode out promptly, and with an elation in his face. He walked downstairs to the hall, and threw open the door.

At once a hand was laid upon his shoulder, a piece of paper thrust into his face, and a gruff voice said something about "a copy." The universal language in which "arrest" is spoken was too intelligible.

Without a moment's delay he was put into a cab, and taken away. And thus Mr. Doughty was delivered into the hands of his enemies, who were looking down on the arrest from the window.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WORLD OF LONDON.

CORINNA NAGLE was now lost to Brickford, and in the great world of London, having gone up to seek her fortune, like so many heroes and heroines before her. It might be thought that she was a young person fairly capable of working her way, having thus so readily cast off those who loved her, or that she was constituted of much too stern stuff to excite sympathy or interest. Yet this would be an unfair judgment. She had a certain coldness, but,

beyond all her other qualities, a vast store of pride; and, as we have seen, she shrank from encountering any more mortifications like those that had attended her. She might, indeed, have tolerated the effects of those that were passed, but her father's strange temper, and curious want of delicacy, where money or interest was concerned, made the future a source of terror for her. She had, therefore, cast off all shrinking or timidity, and was now in London, at humble lodgings, determined to work for her bread.

Almost at starting she was to feel the mortification, the despondency which attends the beginnings of such an operation. The great opera-house manager somehow became a different being in his own kingdom to what he had appeared to be in a country town. Here he was at once hard and practical, and more "difficult." Every-

thing was to be "by-and-by." By-and-by, when she had acquired practice and skill, he would see what could be done. This "by-and-by" meant, of course, some years. At that time there was a faint chance that she might be enrolled in his troupe, say, as Mademoiselle Corinne, or, as her father had so often dreamed, the SIGNORA NAGLIONI, coming on as a white-robed "recipient" of the confidences of the leading lady of the opera. This was not a very brilliant prospect, but Corinna was not discouraged.

She secured a sort of home in one of the interminable little new streets in Pimlico with an elderly lady, to whom she had been recommended, and there began her serious studies. She then set herself to look out for pupils.

Look for pupils! most hopeless and discouraging task in the world; and the

most hopeless and discouraging being in the world is the wistful creature, male or female, who wants to teach the world French, German, the piano, the violin, or the guitar, or the formation of the human voice. This operation always seems to have the air of a benefaction, or of some charitable work; but it is, in truth, a charity intended solely for the teacher, a wish, not so much to teach, as to be supported. The piteous appeal runs not so much "*Do* let yourself be taught," but "Support *me!*" In fact, the number of would-be teachers far exceeds the number of those capable of being taught.

Up this stony acclivity, however, the lovely Corinna determined to struggle. She went through the regular course, first putting herself into the hands of one of those useful merchants who supply tenors and sopranos, players, teachers, actors, pos-

turers, organ-grinders, even, at the shortest notice, and, alas! almost in platoons. It is amazing what an amount of finished talent is thus kept in stock by these "Enter prenners," as her father called them—the graceful singers, the interesting foreigners, who will warble a French romance in a drawing-room with a dramatic charm that would delight the most exacting connoisseur. There was, also, the great musical firm that farmed out troupes of singing men and women, to scour the country, and who sent artists out to evening parties, singing or playing. This much patronage Corinna secured through the good offices of the opera director, who, though unwilling to pledge his own resources, was not insensible to the charms of so handsome a creature, and really exerted his great influence for her in these less important directions.

Thus, then, the lovely Corinna set forth on her toilsome and painful course, ready to go through any drudgery. It was a joyful hour when she learned that she was to attend at "Mrs. George Longpride's," wife to the eminent banker, and who had a palatial mansion at Kensington. This gentleman exhibited everything on the most magnificent scale, and gave everything in a "style," as it is called. He had no taste for music, beyond recognising some such familiar air as "Auld Lang Syne," a test which represents an average amount of popular musical knowledge, and regularly hired his music as he hired his shrubs and waiters for the night, "ordering them" in from a music-shop.

It was a noble house, with marble staircase, conservatory, rich furniture, and pictures, all bought by contract. Gilding was daubed on profusely in every direction,

everything was gaudy and magnificent. In the large drawing-rooms long rows of chairs had been set out, while in the inner one a platform had been erected, where were held, in confinement as it were, and railed off round an imposing pianoforte, the band of ladies and gentlemen who were to contribute to the entertainment of the evening.

Here was Signor Gentili, the fashionable professor who taught singing to the young ladies of the house at a guinea a lesson, and who had been intrusted with the lucrative "job" of contracting with the performers. He had secured the gentlemanly and interesting young French baritone, who sang so tenderly some little musical "anecdotes" in four verses, about a dying child, or abandoned mammas, or soldiers on the field of battle taking one last look at pictures of those they loved. This artist had

only just put out on the great London musical ocean in his little skiff, and the chance of obtaining a stray passenger or two was extended to him, as a favour, by the music-master. There was also found here the tenth-rate soprano lady, who by courtesy belonged to the ranks of a great opera-house, and was only called on for her services on "off" nights in the provinces, but who here assumed all the lofty airs of a prima donna, and gave ground for the host's boast, often repeated during the night to his guests, of "having the opera singers." There was also a violin performer, and an Italian bullet-headed singer who gave volubly what appeared to be comic songs, but which were really classical "buffo" performances.

Finally, there was the stately girl of great beauty and dignity who attracted all eyes as she sat there apart almost, and who was

set down in the bills as Miss Corinna Nagle. The prima donna, a portly, bold, well-painted lady, sniffed at her somewhat disdainfully, though the languishing French baritone and Signor Gentili paid her marked attention.

It must be said that such was not the homage that was extended to the general performance, for every song seemed to be the signal for a universal buzz. There was a room beyond the second drawing-room from whence there was no convenient seeing or hearing, and here a large portion of the company bivouacked, as it were, more than content with their exclusion, and utterly unconscious that, at certain intervals, their bursts of chattering and genteel laughter were borne in upon the general audience, to the interruption of the music. In vain the hostess, with smiles and some alarm, timorously deprecated the noise; it died

away for a few moments, only to swell again presently in greater force.

But there was a wiry, gray-haired little gentleman sitting in the front row, who listened with scrupulous attention to every piece, about whom, at the close of each performance the host would hover, eagerly asking his opinion. This was one Mr. Dodd, who had formerly been a City merchant, and was known for his musical tastes and his "charming parties." He was on friendly terms with the great ladies who rushed about the vast opera stages in agonies of musical distraction, and who came to his house to enjoy the choice dinners which he was celebrated for giving. From the first he had been strangely attracted by Corinna, by her look and attitude, and still more when it had come to her turn to sing.

She had chosen her old song from the

"Orpheus." She felt no nervousness. Her rich, full, noble voice floated across the vacant faces, and entered the vacant ears which were turned to her. On such listeners there was no very profound impression to be produced; but there was a round, pathetic tone, that vibrated as it went to the hearts of those who had taste, and made *them* vibrate. The young men, open-collared Adonises, could, however, pronounce critically on what was strictly within their province, namely, her beauty and attractions; and a burst of genteel applause saluted her as she retired, having sung her song.

A few moments later, Mr. Dodd was beside her, speaking to the conductor:

"My dear Gentili, introduce me to this young lady. Charmed, delighted, Miss Nagle! But I just want to ask you a question about that song. Who taught

you to sing it in that way? Surely you could never have met an old friend of mine."

"Yes," said Corinna, simply, "it was Mr. Doughty who taught me."

"How singular!" said the other, starting. "I knew his style at once. I was wondering, all the time you were singing. Good gracious! I must talk to you about it. Just allow me to sit down by you, for really this is curious."

As soon as he had sat down, he said:

"So you are the young lady? Don't start. I heard all about it. No offence, I assure you."

Corinna was drawing herself up with dignity.

"The fact is, I am one of Doughty's oldest friends, and am too well off, and like him too much, to grudge him his good fortune."

"No one could grudge him that," said Corinna. "He is the most generous and noble of men. I suppose you have heard how ill he has been?"

Mr. Dodd had only heard some rumours of this matter, and eagerly asked for details.

"But when I say," he went on, "that, I don't grudge him his money, I *do* take some merit for magnanimity; as there are some people who would never forgive being 'cut out,' as it is called, by a friend. Our common friend, who died possessed of all this wealth, assured me, only a month before his death, that he had made his will, and had left me everything. To be sure, friend Doughty saw him in the interval, and I suppose made his hay when the sun shone, that is, when he could."

"No such ideas were in his head, you may depend on it," said Corinna, with

some little excitement. "I saw him the night he received the news, and no one could be more careless or unconcerned. You are quite mistaken."

"Perhaps so," said the patron; "and I admire you for taking his part. Forgive me if I say I know the whole of your little history, at least, all but the latter part of it. For to say the truth, after what I heard, I am a little surprised to find you here. Don't be angry," he added, hastily. "I ask no questions. I wish to be your friend."

"I am not angry, indeed," said Corinna, "and I do believe that you wish to be the friend of one who has no friends. Why should you not ask me questions? I am willing to answer them. I think I understand what you mean. After all you had heard of what had gone on down there, you are astonished to find me here. Well,

I have come to fight the battle of life alone. I have left that place and my family too, because it had become unendurable. I was persecuted, harassed, wounded to the quick; turned into a scheming adventuress, whether I would or no."

"But Doughty would have shielded you; indeed, would have given his life for you. I hope you have not treated him unkindly —or made him a sacrifice."

Corinna looked down on the ground, and repeated, "It was unendurable."

"If he has had the misfortune to make you his enemy," said Mr. Dodd, warmly, "I know that it was an unintentional offence. I presume that the matter is all over now, so I may speak freely. If he seemed to have done anything that hurt you, or seemed unkind, I know that he was not to blame."

"He do anything unkind? Never! At this moment I ought to be by his side, not here in this strange place—if I dared. I let myself seem heartless, selfish, ungrateful, oh, so ungrateful!—that is punishment enough. But no one can understand the position in which I was placed. It may be the fault of my own temperament—my own sensitiveness. But"—here she paused for a moment, then added more coldly, "What am I saying! This will all sound strange to you, and I forgot for the moment."

"Not in the least strange," said he, with much interest; "and I can understand the whole, now. All this does you honour. Scruples of this kind, however, may be carried too far. As you have determined on following this career, we must only help you as much as we can. I am a person of some power in the musical world, and can

do a good deal. I see you have wisely chosen a more mundane piece in the second part. That will go home to this company. It is a lovely and graceful piece, that Jewel-song of Gounod's."

He went back to his place, leaving Corinna not a little puzzled, and yet pleased, by his sympathy. Brighter hopes, too, were rising before her. But here was her turn approaching, and she had now to get ready for the performance.

Every musician knows that dainty piece and its piquant graces, its dancing measure, and when Corinna began, her delicious warbling at once riveted attention; her attractive presence added to the charm; and the buzz was gradually hushed down. People whispered, but it was only to express their delight, or ask about her. When she had concluded there was applause that might be called a "burst," con-

sidering the fashionable character of the audience.

Then followed introductions. The host had to come up with many a "Miss Nagle, Lady Mantower wishes to be introduced to you."—"Miss Nagle, Lord Leader has asked me to present him—a very great amateur, I assure you."

These noble personages came up simpering and bending; said they were "charmed," proposed her singing at their parties, or giving lessons to their daughters.

Before the evening came to a close, Mr. Dodd was beside her again, and with much satisfaction, said:

"You will do. You are on the high road to success."

All through that delightful night, Corinna felt a thrill, a whirl; for success, and a crescendo success, that grows and swells even within the space of a few hours, is

always a delicious sensation. The flowers, the lights, the pleased faces, the soft words of congratulation and compliment from persons who wished to recommend themselves—made the whole seem like an agreeable dream. She felt happy and triumphant, for her resolution to be independent now seemed likely to be justified. The whole, too, had a softening effect on her; she found a thought for one now far away, and lying sick, and who would be glad to hear of her triumph.

As she sat there in this curious state of half-delight, half-bewilderment, she saw looking out of the crowd of faces, one face that was looking towards her with an eager interest. She started; for she recognised it at once. A song was going on at the moment; but when it was concluded, the faithless Alfred Duke had made his way through the crowd, and was beside her.

He was dreadfully confused, and it must be said not a little distressed. Here was the enchanting Corinna, whom he had lately left the admired of Brickford, now appearing before him in this rather servile occupation of singing for her bread. Somehow it seemed to him that he was accountable for this change, and for a moment remained silent and humiliated before her.

She received him, without any hostility but with a curious indifference, which another might have taken for contempt.

"I thought you had left England," she said, "and that you were far on your journey."

"We did embark," he said, "but there was an accident to the steamer, and we had to put back. In another week, we sail again. It will be years before I return to England."

"No doubt," said Corinna, smiling;

"but how curious it is that I should meet you here."

"It does look a little destiny," said he, fatuously, and with the old air of gallantry.

"I did not mean that," said she, haughtily. "You heard, I suppose, that I was to sing here to-night?"

He was confused. "Well, I did," he said. "I saw the programme at a friend's house, and I was really startled when I read your name. I then procured an invitation, for I was longing to see you, to explain some matters——"

"Which it is too late to explain now," said Corinna, with perfect good humour. "There was nothing to prevent you explaining them down at Brickford; but you chose to fly in that abrupt, and I must say, unnecessary fashion. What did you dread? I can assure you I would not have detained you. I believe you have some faith in my

candour and truth, and I can assure you that such is the case. One thing, indeed, I did feel——"

"You didn't feel for *me*, I suppose," he said, in a wounded tone.

"Not in the least," said Corinna, smiling. "But I felt the talk and gossip of the place—the ill-natured remarks to which you exposed me. They assumed that I was disappointed; that I had set my heart on gaining your affection, and had failed. I fear, from my behaviour, it looked as though I had. But really I am glad that we have met, were it only to assure you I never thought seriously of the matter."

The young man answered bitterly,

"You are determined to mortify me, it seems. Still, you can hardly wonder that I thought the opposite. You were kind enough to distinguish me with——"

"Oh, as for that, I was forced into that

attitude by a number of circumstances. Forgive my speaking with such frankness," she added, with genuine earnestness; "but really, in justice to myself, I ought to explain. There was my father and family, and the contempt with which I was treated by yours; and, above all, there was one for whom I had a sincere regard, and who I found too late had the same for me. But such was the wretched complication of things, that I was forced to act a part I did not feel, and appear to be the most ungrateful person in the world!"

Corinna spoke these words with infinite warmth and feeling. Greatly mortified, the young man said,

"I suppose you mean the man we used to call Old Doughty. I always saw your preference."

"I thought you did," said Corinna, calmly. "I need make no concealment now,

as I shall probably never see him again. I am going to work out my life in this new course, and I hope to succeed. Some years hence, when you return on leave, you will perhaps see my name at the door of one of the great opera-houses as Dinorah, or Norma. Perhaps I shall recognise your face in a stall, as I saw you so far off to-night. There, my turn has come round again. Now for my song."

The young man felt as if a dark curtain had descended between him and all that was bright on earth. There was a something so business-like, so free from resentment in Corinna's manner, that he felt that all was over for him, and of the most mortifying fashion, and that the enchanting Corinna had always been indifferent to him.

Even before that night closed in, he was to see something which confirmed his opinion.

The party was now breaking up for supper down-stairs. The musicians have generally to escort each other, the languishing baritone offering his arm to the stout soprano. The young lord, who sang and played the violin in the ranks of "the Macallum Minstrels," offered his arm to take Corinna, and was not without disappointed competitors. He told her he was enchanted, and that everybody was enchanted, and that she must really sing at the next concert of the Macallum Minstrels. "She was just the thing for them," he added, "clinching" his compliments.

They had reached the hall, and were turning into the supper-room, when a servant came forward with one of those brick-coloured envelopes which always cause a flutter, and are opened with eagerness, no matter how familiar we may be with their reception.

"A telegram, miss," he said; "sent on here from your house."

"Good gracious, Miss Nagle," said the musical young member of the Macallum Minstrels. "I hope there's nothing wrong. 'Pon my word, should be so sorry."

In much trepidation, Corinna hurried into the cloak-room, and read :—

"From	To
William Gardiner,	Corinna Nagle,
Brickford.	London.

"They have seized on poor Doughty, and to-morrow are going to take him away, and confine him in a mad-house. They have had me arrested to get me out of the way. There is no one here to help him or to save him. Come down at once, like a brave, honest girl, and I believe that you will defeat them all."

"No bad news, I hope," said the musical

lord again. "Should be so sorry. 'Pon my word, I really should."

"Oh, I don't know. I must go home at once," said Corinna, agitated. "Would you be kind enough to get me my things? Good night! Thank you."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EVENING BEFORE.

ALL Brickford, as may well be conceived, was in commotion at the news now spread about. It was known that Mr. Doughty's relations had at last felt it their painful duty to interfere, and that the "unfortunate gentleman," as he was called, at that moment was in restraint, or at least carefully watched in his own house. There was much astonishment, and much more moralising over this sad news.

See how the greatest wealth, it was re-

peated, was not exempt from drawbacks. No matter how blessings might be distributed, there was still a general level to which all things were reduced. Still, there was a good deal of sympathy expressed; for he was a charitable, gentle-tempered man, who had done good and won popularity. There was, however, a certain class of business men, who, by a sort of instinct, arrived at the true conclusion, namely, that it was an awkward affair, and that there was some plotting at the bottom. It was, in short, talked of a great deal. As Will Gardiner was not very restrained in his speech, and his wife said everywhere that the proceedings taken had been at the instigation of "those Dukes," it was not surprising that rumours should have begun to swell, and that indignation should be expressed at the treatment of the "unfortunate gentleman."

The whole position of affairs, indeed, now offered the strangest contrast to the state of things when our characters were first introduced to the reader. An amiable virtuoso, whom nobody thought much of —a humble music-master and his daughter timorously trying to make their way with some polite average ladies and gentlemen of society clustering round—these were the acting figures. Now, the "amiable virtuoso" had become the victim of a conspiracy; the music-master's daughter had become a heroine, and been driven out on the world, while the average ladies and gentlemen had changed into fiercely contending parties, each striving to carry out their ends without scruple or remorse.

Two of the conspirators met on the evening of this day, when it had grown dark; for such points Lady Duke now found herself considering. She made her

way to the office of Mr. Birkenshaw. She was admitted in a secret and confidential fashion.

"It was most imprudent not to have settled the matter to-day, and have done with it," said Mr. Birkenshaw angrily; "the thing will get about in the town, and be talked of."

"Well, let it be," said Lady Duke, stiffly. "They are welcome to talk. We, as the relations, are acting in his interest."

"No doubt," said the other, with a deferential look; "but I still think it was unwise. That fellow, Gardiner, will be certain to get himself released—he has plenty of friends, and he will give us a great deal of trouble."

"You seem to me to misunderstand the whole matter," said Lady Duke, with her cold manner. "By your way of talking, it would seem that there was some plot

on foot. We are only acting in the regular way."

Mr. Birkenshaw again looked at her, and shook his head.

"You are quite under a mistake," he said. "Disabuse your mind of that at once, Lady Duke. If it were all regular, we should have no trouble in the world. Neither would you have done me the honour of coming to me. But these views are beside the matter; the point is, having got so far successfully, to finish off the whole to-morrow. But you should not have opposed me to-day at the house. By this moment he would have been safe, and under restraint, and undergoing the treatment proper for him."

He spoke these words decidedly, if not sternly, and Lady Duke felt a little awed, as if in the presence of some disagreeable and masterful personage. She

did not contradict him, and after some further discourse of a more confidential kind, went her way, not without some misgivings.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

IT was late that same evening, about the time that Brickford had nearly finished its dinner, and the lamps were lighted in the streets, that Corinna arrived. She did not go to her father's house in the Crescent, but repaired straight to Mr. Doughty. It was, indeed, a different Corinna from the one that had left such a short time before. She had gone away a heroine, and had returned a heroine; but it was now one of a different kind. The first was all self-

sacrifice, a sense that imparted a coldness, and the sternness of duty; the second a glowing, eager, impulsive girl, with fire and heroism in her eyes.

"I can have no scruples now," she said to herself again and again. "All that is at an end! Indeed, I allowed them to prey on me too long. Let all here say what they will, I am called on to act now. I should be the most ungrateful and ungenerous of creatures, as indeed he must long since have thought me, if I shrank from what is my duty."

She felt a sort of elation at this casting away the bonds which had restrained her for such a time. Her plan was—and she felt a secret confidence that her strength in a good cause would overcome all that could be opposed to her, no matter how superior in force—her plan was to rescue this generous friend from his oppressors, set him

free, and then return to the life of drudgery she had laid out for herself. Certainly she might well seem a curiously incomprehensible being, as indeed she often appeared to herself.

Mr. Doughty was sitting in his room. Notwithstanding the events of the day, he was in good spirits, ever and anon smiling to himself, and walking about with a sort of exultation. The guardians who were officially in charge were close at hand, though Doctor Spooner did not venture to show himself. Perhaps he felt that he could not longer carry out the fiction of its "all being for his own good," or "for the interest of the patient." He had thrown off the mask, and felt that the only thing remaining was to carry out fearlessly to the end the bold scheme he had contrived. It was a gloomy house at that time, and

it seemed oppressed with a sense of guilt and shame.

"This," said Mr. Doughty, as he paced to and fro, "has indeed made the scales fall from my eyes. Now has the world and human nature been revealed to me with a vengeance. Here am I, that used to think everybody so amiable and well-intentioned! —here am I now assailed, persecuted, and hunted by a set of conspirators! And *she*, too! For no fault of mine, but because I dared to like and to love her, I find myself deserted! She has fled from me as if I were infected. I should not mind being deceived in the rest, but to be deceived in her! It serves me right. What business had a middle-aged man with love or with admiration? That is all for the young. When she hears the new revelation—which she will, of course—this feeling will reach contempt. She will think it an insult that

an elderly being, with nothing to compensate for his blemishes, should have dared to—but what am I saying?—I do her injustice. I know not what I am doing. What was there in me, a poor foolish recluse, that should have attracted her? However, it was a pleasant dream while it lasted, though I would that I had *not* dreamed it, for it has left me cold, unhappy, and deserted. I must now only go back to my music and my fiddles, and try and get such comfort as I can out of them. Mine is destined to be a weary life unto the end! But it serves me right."

And his head drooped upon his hands. The room was half darkened, the twilight was departing—he sat there in the shadow. A gentle hand touched his shoulder, but he was not conscious of it. It touched him again, and then with a weary, though not surprised air, he raised his head.

He started up almost with a cry. She, the divine Corinna, stood before him with the sweetest and most encouraging expression! He gazed and wondered. He thought it was some vision, and that his long weary dream was still going on. For a moment he could not speak, but remained gazing at the beautiful apparition. After the weary time that had gone by, the sickness, the imprisonment, he now felt like a captive whom some sweet angel had come to visit.

"You have come to me! I knew you would. I hoped so all along," he said, at last, in a low voice. "Oh, if you knew how I have thought of you! How good, how noble, how generous of you to think of poor deserted me!"

Somehow he did not seem to believe that this was some chance visit; by a sort of inspiration he appeared to have reached

at the truth. He knew that she had come back to him to shield, or to save, him.

"I came," she said, "the instant that I heard of all this. A kind friend let me know. I fear that you have thought me unkind and cruel, but if you were to know the reason, you would not think so hardly of me. All that I will tell you later, but now all I wish to show you is, that there is one friend who feels for you, and would do anything in the world to save you from your cruel persecutors!"

Mr. Doughty was looking at her with unspeakable gratitude, almost with adoration. All he could do was to repeat several times:

"And you have come to me! What injustice have I done you! I thought I had offended you—made you my enemy by my foolish admiration, driven you away from

me—forced you to enter on a hard-working, toilsome life, but——"

Corinna coloured a little, her eyes were cast down. She answered:

"Offended! I fear if we speak of that—but all that is past now. We must save you from these wretches—*I* shall do it, if all the rest be wanting."

"*You!*" he said, with an eager look. "But have you thought of the difficulties? And what can even you do? They are all against me, every one. I am quite helpless here."

"No matter for that! I have an instinct within which tells me I shall find means and strength. They will not dare to oppose me. I have a certain confidence that I shall save you."

"But have you thought," he went on slowly, still gazing at her with that look of earnest admiration—"have you thought of

another danger, not for me, but for yourself?—what the cruel tongues of these people may do, how they will be busy with your name once more?—making you suffer the old torture, just as they drove you from this place before? You must be saved from that."

"I have not thought of it," said Corinna. "Rather I am prepared to accept the worst as a penance and expiation. I disdain to be carrying on any hypocritical pretences any longer, or to be imposing on your noble nature. I did not really suffer from such things; I despised them too much for that. But there was quite another reason for this sensitiveness."

Mr. Doughty was following every word. With that sort of gentle chivalry which was his nature, he was determined to anticipate any confession that might hurt her

pride, even at the risk of a fresh mortification for himself.

"You thought," he said, hesitatingly, "that your motives would be misconceived —by me, I mean; that your father's position, your own, and mine—the 'great millionaire,' as they called me — excluded everything from the matter but self-interest. Yours was too lofty a nature to endure the suspicion of being made a mere instrument for securing money and fortune. And so you left this place, and went out into the world. I did not see this then, so clearly as I ought to have done; but what you have done to-night has revealed it all to me."

She looked at him gratefully.

"This is the true solution," he went on, rather hurriedly; "for love or liking was of course the most childish absurdity. You had given your heart to the young, as you

should have done, or," he added, nervously, "you *would* have done had you found a heart worthy of you. As for myself, there was nothing but absurdity in the idea of a cold autumn love like mine, which I had the presumption to think of offering to you."

Corinna looked at him with honest, beaming eyes. She said :

"As you have spoken so generously and openly, I shall do the same. Why should I let you believe such a thing, or think so meanly of me ? No ; of your love, the love of a noble, generous man, I should have been proud ; I would have welcomed it as an honour. I was, indeed, caught for a time by the apparent devotion of another, but I soon saw how I had been led away. There there was no real worth. When I found that I had allowed myself to be so deceived, when I could so lightly have

thought of giving my heart to the first that offered, I determined that I would never offer you the mere débris of such affection as I had to give. I felt that you might come at last to despise me, and thus it was that I appeared to make such a return to all your kindness. There is my whole confession, which I feel deep confusion in making to you. And, further, I will tell you this. Had you, indeed, been a poor man, it would have been my pride to show you how much I felt the honour you had done me in thinking of one so unworthy of you as I am. Indeed I can assure you of this."

A sort of light seemed to spread over the listener's face—a sort of exultation.

"You can not mean this, surely?" he said. "These are merely words of comfort addressed to the poor invalid? How can I tell you now? Yet you will learn it to-

morrow, if not sooner. And then you may fancy yourself bound by those words. Oh, Corinna! what will you do when you hear what I have to tell you?"

She looked at him in astonishment, but said, gently:

"Let me hear it, and at once."

"It was *you*, recollect," he went on, with a sort of pleading manner, "that first said it. But you may not have thought what you were saying. Nor must you for a second think yourself bound by it. But, Corinna," he added, with an effort, "here is the truth, and the whole truth! I *am* the poor man you describe. The wealth that I was credited with has passed from me to another, and I am the poor, lonely musical recluse that you first saw me!"

He did not dare to look at her face for

a few moments, then raised his own doubtfully.

She was smiling at him. He read in those holy eyes that all his troubles were ended.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONSPIRATORS DISCOMFITED.

THE following morning was the brightest that Brickford had seen for many a day. There was a good deal of flutter among the characters who have figured in this history, especially in the members of the Duke confederacy, who now witnessed the approach of the moment that was to bring the crowning stroke of their operations.

It was an early hour when a carriage drove up to the door of Mr. Doughty's house, and Mr. Birkenshaw and Doctor

Spooner hurried out of it. Their ill-omened attendants were already waiting near the door, and met them as they came up. Now was the stroke to fall; and some good people passing, who knew "that poor Doughty," again lamented the sudden toppling over of a fine intellect, a catastrophe, however, unhappily too common, so often found to follow on a sudden access of wealth.

Mr. Doughty was in his room, waiting the guests that he expected. Who would have known him now—restored, bright, young—even as was the transformed Faust in Gounod's opera? That night had brought him back his health—at least he thought no more of his sickness or of his pains. Hope, joy, and even exultation, were on the face of the middle-aged lover.

The visitors entered with a hurried and determined manner, as though anticipating

a disagreeable task, but were not a little confounded at the spectacle of the beaming, well-dressed, and even gay personage that had taken the place of the gloomy and almost hypochondriacal invalid they had quitted the day before. The cordiality and good-humour with which he welcomed them was no less embarrassing. Doctor Spooner, however, came to business at once.

"Mr. Doughty," he said, "I am sorry to say I must ask you to come with me for a short journey. I am authorised to do it, and hope you will not make any opposition, for it is for your good."

Mr. Doughty smiled, and bowed with enjoyment, as though he were laying himself out for a pleasant scene in a comedy.

"I know all that," he answered, gaily. "Your duty, and other honourable motives, prompt you. That is, of course."

"That, of course," said Doctor Spooner, uneasily.

"And we had better not lose any time, which, for you, is no doubt highly precious——Ah; visitors, I see," said Mr. Doughty from the window. "Come to say good-bye to me, I suppose, before I go."

Doctor Spooner answered rather roughly:

"We can have no more delays. No persons can be admitted here. I will not allow any such scenes as we had yesterday. Have the goodness to see, Mr. Birkenshaw, that no one is admitted."

"Surely," said the other, mildly, "you would not deny me this small favour. It may be long before I have such a chance again. You are not going to be harsh to me on this last occasion."

There was a curiously ironical tone in all Mr. Doughty's words, that was making

them more and more distrustful each moment.

"We have had trifling enough," said the doctor, "and cannot allow any more."

"Then I fear that you are too late," said Mr. Doughty. "Here are the visitors. What, William Gardiner! Why, I thought they had secured you in durance vile. And my old friend Dodd come down to see me, at such a critical time! Well, this *is* kindness!"

It was, indeed, Will Gardiner, with his open, beaming face mantling with smiles and good-humour.

"My dear, dear Doughty," he said rushing to his friend, "this is more of your kindness? I am free. Oh, these rascals are here, are they!"

"Hush, hush!" said Mr. Doughty, angrily. "You must not speak to gentlemen in that style. They are only doing their duty, and

are to take me away in a few moments—that is, if they will think it worth their while, now that Mr. Dodd has come down to Brickford."

That gentleman advanced, smiling.

"My poor Doughty," he said, "in what a way I find you! I received your telegram," he went on, "and the amazing news it contained. Why, it is like a romance. I met Miss Nagle this morning, and she is coming here."

"Look here, gentlemen," said Doctor Spooner, with a sort of dogged fury in his eyes. "There is some understanding here among you all. And I suppose you have planned this meeting. But, let me tell you, we are not to be put off from carrying out our purpose. We are authorised to do so by the proper parties, and are acting legally. I warn you, we have assistance here, and will tolerate no interference."

"No one shall interfere, my good Doctor Spooner," said Mr. Doughty. "You may depend on me. I mean to go with you, never fear—that is, if you will take me."

"And these parties you have alluded to," said Mr. Dodd, "if I might ask, who are they?"

"The relations, sir. Lady Duke and her husband. They will be here in a moment; I have sent for them. Never you fear; we know what we are about."

"Oh, she certainly ought to be present. We might wait a moment for her. There can be no harm, especially as our friend here shows such willing dispositions."

They did wait, moodily and gloomily, for a few minutes. Doctor Spooner and his friend retired into the window: Will Gardiner looking at the two confederates with a wicked hostility that made them uncomfortable.

Mr. Dodd had just time to say to his friend, "Why, this is the noblest and most generous act! The world will ring with it. But can you be serious—surely you know ——" when the door opened, and Lady Duke entered excitedly. She started as she saw the room crowded, but instantly recovered herself, then said with great promptitude and decision:

"You must not lose a moment, Doctor Spooner. I authorise everything, and am responsible. I wish everybody to be present now, as they insist on intruding here. The certificate is duly signed, and I am the nearest relation. There is an indelicacy in this confusion and interference, but I am not accountable. Who is this gentleman, pray?"

"An old friend of Mr. Doughty's, madam."

"It will not do, sir," said the lady. "If

he gathered all the old friends he had in the world, they shall not be allowed to interfere."

"The lady is quite right," said Mr. Doughty. "And I think it is time this rather unpleasant scene should end. I am quite ready to go."

"There, you hear," said Doctor Spooner; "and I will ask all the visitors to retire."

"Yes, my dear kind friends, do go," said Mr. Doughty, "and let me get ready for this unusual journey. I am quite ready. My things can be packed later. In fact, what shall I want with things in the palace I am going to visit?"

"You hear," said Lady Duke, in a low voice. "You hear those words—he thinks he is going to 'a palace?'"

"Yes, this excitement," added the doctor, "may have the worst consequences,

and increase our difficulties materially. I entreat you, gentlemen, go."

"Just let me say one word," said Mr. Doughty, "as I may not have so favourable an opportunity hereafter, and my words will not naturally have the same effect. Lady Duke and Mr. Spooner will not object, I am sure. It is as to the property which I am supposed to be possessed of."

The doctor and Lady Duke looked intelligently at their neighbours.

"Yes, *supposed* to be possessed of," he repeated. "Happy I am to have no anxieties on that score to disturb me. Some time ago I had prepared a will leaving the whole, with the exception of a few legacies, to a person for whom I had the greatest regard. That will I destroyed, and it is just as well that I did, for I find that I was disposing of what I had really no title to."

Again intelligent looks on the part of Lady Duke and her allies.

"Really what I am going to tell will seem like a bit of romance; but you will understand it all in a moment. My watchful friends here, Doctor Spooner and others, will recollect that they often found me searching through these trunks, and examining the papers they contained. The truth is, some time ago I found a memorandum which seemed to allude to a document which made quite a different disposition of the property, and I felt it my duty to search for it, which I did with great pains. I was rewarded for my trouble."

Lady Duke was beginning to turn a little pale—Doctor Spooner and his ally to breathe hard.

"I was rewarded, I say, though some might think it was an odd sort of reward. I found," he went on slowly, "this paper,

which is a WILL, a will of much later date than the document which made me be considered so lucky a man. There stands the real legatee, Mr. Dodd, the old friend of the testator! It is all his!"

A cry broke from Lady Duke. A furious burst of rage from Doctor Spooner.

"Now," continued Mr. Doughty, placidly, and rising from his chair, "having made my little disclosure, I am ready to go with you. Will you take me?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAST SCENE OF ALL.

A SORT of stupor had settled on the confederates.

Mr. Dodd inspected the document that was handed to him, with due gravity, and said:

"Well, I must say I had expected this, and, in truth, was a little astonished when I heard that another had been chosen. I am very, very sorry for you, Doughty."

"I am not," said Mr. Doughty, smiling; "the loss of this, as you must know, may save me from some inconveniences which

these good people were meditating for me. Liberty cannot be too dearly purchased. However, if they still insist on it, I suppose I must go."

He seemed to delight in keeping up the comedy of the situation.

"They have been at a vast deal of trouble, attending and watching me. Lady Duke, here, has been like a perfect sister of charity. They are so concerned for my state that they have brought their people, and carriage, and everything. We ought not to detain them longer."

Lady Duke was looking at him darkly.

"This is all very pleasant for you, and you think you have brought this trickery very happily to an end. As you say, justly, we have acted in your interest, and watched, and taken care of you. We are therefore prepared—in your interests,"—she added, sneeringly, "still to look after you. And,

as all is ready for your departure, I am willing to undertake your removal to a place where you will be duly cared for. Give the proper instructions, Doctor Spooner, and see that they are carried out."

Spite, rage, and disappointment were contending with each other in her face. But her agent only shook his head, as who should say, "The game is up, madam."

"What," said Mr. Dodd, smiling, "my poor friend, who was known, and is known, as the shrewdest and most sensible of men, though under a very quiet and simple exterior, to be made out astray in his intellects! What folly! You made a sad mistake, madam, when you and yours selected him as a victim—you pitched on the wrong man altogether. But this is trifling. You may send away those people that I see below at the door. This disinterested doc-

tor and his friend may now, I think, retire from your house, Doughty?"

Mr. Doughty, still pleasant over the matter, answered:

"Well, I am not going to force my company on them. But really, after this eagerness of weeks, and the general anxiety about me, it is a little mortifying to find myself reduced to the position of a mere cypher. I am afraid that nobody cares about me now, or what becomes of me."

The two men retired, but Lady Duke held her ground. That proud lady was determined not to slink off in company with her defeated emissaries, but would hold her ground until some more creditable way of retiring offered. She trusted to the chances of events. But there was more mortification in store for her.

Mr. Doughty had gone several times to the window with some anxiety.

"I am glad you are remaining, Lady Duke," he said, "as I should wish you to be present when I have to make a little announcement rather interesting to myself and one other person."

"I have no interest in any matter that concerns you," said the lady, haughtily.

"What, all gone within a few minutes?" said Mr. Doughty, good-humouredly. "Don't say that, for consistency's sake. Ah, here they come at last!"

"My goodness gracious!" said a familiar voice. "My poor fellow, how they have been treating you!" It was Mr. Nagle who had entered. "And so all the fortune's gone to another. This is the gentleman, I suppose." And Mr. Nagle looked at the new inheritor with a curious questioning look, as though trying to discover whether any musical tastes lurked within, whether he was married or single, or any way suited

to prosper and further the Nagle fortunes. "Well, it can't be helped," he said. "By the way, here's Corinna coming up the stairs. She would come up and see her old friend."

Lady Duke started. All her enemies seemed to be gathering to confront her. And here was the worst mortification of all, that this girl should arrive at such a moment to see her defeat. For Corinna she always entertained a special dislike, that began so far back as that little scene where she had interrupted the composition of the posters. In presence of the lofty character of Corinna she always felt inferior. She, too, showed no awe of the superior lady.

There she stood in the doorway: the enchanting Corinna, the music-master's daughter, looking round on them all with an expressible air of dignity and nobility.

She seemed to be Corinna Victrix—the heroine who had won the victory through all the little vicissitudes of the story. Her gentle gaze rested without hostility even on Lady Duke.

Mr. Doughty, no longer old Doughty, so bright and happy was his face, advanced to meet her, and taking her hand, led her into the room.

"At last," he said, "my troubles and trials have come to an end. Yet all through I have had my guiding star. True, I have lost all my wealth, but I have found a compensation and consolation, which I dared not have looked for, had I kept my riches. As it now stands, there seems to be no connexion between the loss and the gain; but I can say this," he added, looking on the face of Corinna, "had I believed that this sacrifice was necessary, as the price for

your affection, I should have paid it cheerfully."

Mr. Nagle was listening with a wonder in his face. He said nothing, but it could be seen by any one that he thought this a foolish, weak, and injudicious view. However, he "washed his hands of the whole matter."

Corinna's eyes wandered round the room to the faces of all present, then rested on Mr. Doughty's.

"Henceforth my life is yours," she said. "Long before this," she added, "it would have been yours had the world here allowed it. It is my pride and joy to let this be known to every one."

"A splendid gift," said Lady Duke, scornfully. "You will bring quite a dowry to the husband you are so proud of."

"Lady Duke speaks with exceeding accuracy," said Mr. Dodd. "Miss Corinna

does bring with her a very sufficient dowry. I am a rich man myself, and independent of any such windfalls as these. My old friend has refused to take back even a portion of what ill luck has deprived him of. But he cannot prevent me giving a portion to the young lady who has chosen to share his fortunes. When I return to town, I shall settle half of what has come to me on her, and much good may it do her," added the old amateur very warmly.

The cloud of doubt and bewilderment which for many weeks had hung over Mr. Nagle's face had now miraculously cleared away. He became of a sudden again the old familiar Nagle, proud and hopeful, such as he was seen at the commencement of this story.

L'ENVOI.

THE rest the ingenious reader will readily supply. He can easily call up the image of the enchanting Corinna, stately and magnificent, living in town, happy, loving, and a queen of song, admired and loved by her husband. Never was she ashamed of, or did she disclaim, or banish into rural districts with an allowance, that "odd father" of hers. She rather lent all her exertions to get him on. Thus aided he found his way into fashionable circles, and really hoped in time to put down that pushing, "squeaking" Tympano

who teaches the duchesses. A racy spectacle it was to see the veteran sit down to the instrument at some private party, and "give them" the Death of Nelson after the manner of the "late imperishable Braham." Fashionable people, however, received this performance, the grotesque smilings, secret conferences with the keys, &c., with much amusement. Not in such company was found the great Lady Duke, about whose family and their fate one significant word was but too often uttered in polite circles when inquiries were made about it, namely, "smashed!" She long lived in France, at Dinan, where the general naturally took high social position.

Their son travelled about with his regiment, and was married, having been "taken in" by a faded young lady, an attorney's daughter at Chatham, a far worse match than the enchanting Corinna. That image

often comes back on him in his uncomfortable life.

The last word shall deal with that heroine, who was more and more admired and followed, and by none more than by her husband, formerly familiarly known as Old Doughty, but now called by that irreverent appellation no longer. With him, and with many pleasures, her life goes on in a charming round. She wants nothing; has all the happiness that money and music and devoted love can furnish; and having once chosen love in preference to money, shall never again "be put to her election."

THE END.

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